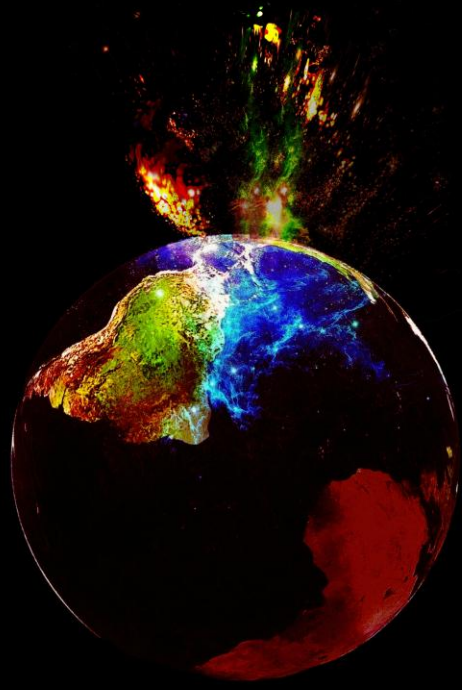
REVELATION'S GONE GLOBAL

EXPLORING JOHN'S FUTURE



Steve H Hakes

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Revelation's Gone Global

Exploring John's Future

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Steve H Hakes

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Thanks to…

- Barry Chant (Australian pentecostal pastor and teacher): for truth
- C S Lewis (Irish teacher par excellence): for meaning

Real life is a life of gratitude

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Biblical Abbreviations

Ac. *Acts*
Am. *Amos*
Chr. *Chronicles*
Col. *Colossians*
Cor. *Corinthians*
Dan. *Daniel*
Dt. *Deuteronomy*
Ec. *Ecclesiastes*
Eph. *Ephesians*
Est. *Esther*
Ex. *Exodus*
Ezk. *Ezekiel*
Ezr. *Ezra*
Gal. *Galatians*
Gen. *Genesis*
Hab. *Habakkuk*
Heb. *Hebrews*
Hg. *Haggai*
Hos. *Hosea*
Is. *Isaiah*
Jas. *James*
Jg. *Judges*
Jhn. *John*
Jl. *Joel*
Jnh. *Jonah*
Job Job
Jos. *Joshua*
Jr. *Jeremiah*
Jude Jude
Kg. *Kings*
Lk. *Luke*
Lm. *Lamentations*
Lv. *Leviticus*
Mic. *Micah*
Mk. *Mark*
Ml. *Malachi*
Mt. *Matthew*
Nah. *Nahum*
Nb. *Numbers*
Neh. *Nehemiah*
Ob. *Obadiah*
Phm. *Philemon*
Php. *Philippians*
Pr. *Proverbs*
Ps(s). *Psalm*(s)
Pt. *Peter*
Rm. *Romans*
Ruth Ruth
Rv. *Revelation*
Sam. *Samuel*
Sg. *Song of Songs*
Ths. *Thessalonians*
Tm. *Timothy*
Tts. *Titus*
Zc. *Zechariah*
Zp. *Zephaniah*

Grades[1]

Percent	**100-95**	**94-90**	**89-85**	**84-80**	**79-75**	**74-70**	**69-65**	
Letter	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	
Point	4.3	4	3.7	3.3	3	2.7	2.3	
Percent	**64-60**	**59-55**	**54-50**	**49-45**	**44-40**	**39-27**	**26-14**	**13-00**
Letter	C	C-	D+	D	D-	U+	U	U-
Point	2	1.7	1.3	1	0.7	0	0	0

[1] For handier sorting in tables, I advise using A1/A2/A3 and B1/B2/B3, etc, for grade letters. I have put these here in the more familiar forms of, eg, A+/A/A- and B+/B/B-. For grade points, I round final totals to the nearest 0.5 points.

Preface

Jane Austen described Mrs. Allen as having a "vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking[, so that while] she never talked a great deal, so she could never be entirely silent; and, therefore, while she sat at her work, if she lost her needle or broke her thread, if she heard a carriage in the street, or saw a speck upon her gown, she must observe it aloud, whether there was anyone at leisure to answer her or not" (*Northanger Abbey*, ch.9). Perhaps more like her than I might wish, while there is much in *Revelation* to observe aloud, I have tried to talk a great deal only about the points that have grabbed my attention.

This book is humble in intent, and I, though perhaps a fool, would certainly be one—and a big one at that—to intend more. It is intended to make a view, not to make a case; not to give the best key to unlocking *Revelation*, but to creatively encourage its earnest reading. Then perhaps for us the old heavy door might budge and open a crack or two, allowing some insights into what was to John the future, and which some say is to us the past. And perhaps, if we cannot get in with this key, we will be encouraged to knock, and the owner of the house will kindly open up the door to us and let us dine, as he did to John on Patmos. But perhaps that richness of revelation might be too much for us, and in kindness the door will remain closed. Paul and John received an abundance of revelation, but few have their size shoes to walk as giants. But if we walk not upon their mountains, we may at least visit the foothills of their visions.

For Bible texts, my main English versions (MEVV) are the CEB/CEV/ERV/LEB/NABRE/NCV/NIV/NKJV/NLT/NRSV. For comparative grading, the best will be A+, and the worst D-: none shall fail. In quotes, I often amend [the LORD] to [Yahweh], and remove false capitals from nouns and pronouns. I take some liberties when quoting generally: for example, updating gender style, adjusting tenses, standardising abbreviations, and simplifying bibliographies intext.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Prologue

It is good to see how Bible transmission, passing on the Word to different peoples and generations, has been done. All too easily we can forget that many persons unknown to us, perished in the process, for it isn't only in our days that the Bible has been a target for 'political' correctivists seeking to reshape society into their own image and to bully God's people out of truth. Christian blood seemed cheap. Without their blood, sweat, and tears, we would not be so richly blessed. They have left their mark on faithful transmission, and on making the Bible readable for all people.

And all too easily we can forget that creating the biblical material—I focus on the latter section, commonly called the new testament or new covenant—was produced in a frequently hostile environment. It is centred around Jesus messiah, who himself was executed because the Roman governor bowed to political pressure from ethnic Jews, and also because it was God's will that he should be executed. God had intended for good what they had intended for evil, getting, in a sense, a Joseph into Egypt for the blessings of all parties. Besides Jesus being an ethnic Jew, the earliest followers were predominantly of that race, and often faced hostility from their fellows, who in turn helped to turn Rome against the followers of The Way, the Christians. As a rule of thumb, persecution by ethnic Jews (Jerusalem) was taken over by ethnic Gentiles (Rome). But overt persecution was patchy, and was intermixed with tolerance, sometimes secret acceptance.

John himself had been exiled to Patmos. John suffered from no false illusions about the world of man being some hunky-dory heaven. That man's world was tough, especially to those who stood up

against the cultural flow, and insisted on the new flow from Christ. John yearned to see what the future held, and special visions were granted to him of a story to end all stories.

To some extent, the West has long been shielded, but nowadays more and more of God's witnesses are being at the least exiled from their jobs, fined, imprisoned, beaten up, even beheaded, because of their witness. The spirit of Rome has arisen as an ancient spectre. John wrote comfort and boldness to his C1 audience; that comfort and boldness is for us too.

Meet the Players

The resurrection was a revealing of what had been secret, namely about messiah being global. *Revelation* is a revealing by messiah of what had been a secret about background powers, a disclosure to John for Christians.[2] The style of disclosure, though clear enough in his days, soon fell out of fashion. Indeed, it soon seemed so mysterious that after a while the global church sat back and asked whether *Revelation* had a global message. Indeed, had it an apostolic signature? Though the Montanists and Origen had endorsed it, they had fallen out of favour. By the mid-C3, Dionysius of Alexandria reported that some believers rejected it as simply too difficult to be disclosure, too veiled to be unveiling, but he added that far from rejecting what we can't comprehend, we should be wowed by its wonder (see Eusebius' *Church History*, 7.25.5).[3]

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2 The term, revelation, comes from the Greek term αποκαλυψις/*apokalypsis* (disclosure) which comes from the verb form αποκαλυπτω/*apokaluptō*—to uncover/reveal/disclose: the antonym is καλυπτω/*kaluptō*—to cover/conceal/enclose. The noun form καλυμμα/*kalumma* (from καλυπτω) is used for temple veiling, and in measure John's disclosure carries an open-Moses/temple view (see 2 Cor.3:16).

3 Whatever Wikipedia might say—IMO it's a frequently unsound site for theology and ethics—he neither said that *Revelation* could have been written by Cerinthus, nor implied that accepting it was just his personal opinion. The Cerinthus attribution goes back to the Alogi (the Illogical?), a bunch of late C2

As to what *Revelation* means or meant, four big replies have developed, and it almost goes without saying that unless these replies made some sense out of the material, they would never have gotten off the ground—or at least would not still fly. Again, it almost goes without saying that unless the replies disagree with each other, they would not be alternative replies at all, but merely echoes or restatements, even as if all sang the same song, they might form one choir: they are defined by difference. Can the replies about its meaning can be symphonised?

"*Revelation*...has puzzled readers throughout church history, because of the very nature of its apocalyptic genre, combined with elements of prophecy and letter writing. With its many allusions to *Genesis*, however, especially at its end, *Revelation* forms a fitting literary inclusio, or bookend, with *Genesis*...." (Blomberg 56). So, what are these big replies to the question, replies sometimes shaped by their life settings?

Four Patterns for Interpretation

Let's look at the four big replies, though this book will focus on one. **Preterism**[4] focuses on meaning for the first century. **Historicism** focuses on unfolding application throughout the church age. **Futurism** focuses on a few years before Christ's return. **Idealism** largely bypasses timeslots, and focuses on repeated pictures of application that are only loosely connected to any given point in church history—the red horse rampages every now and again.

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believers who, in radically rejecting Montanism's radical use of John, radically rejected John's writings as heresy.

4 In different contexts, these terms can carry different meanings. The prefix bit (pre[ter]-) is meant to say that it finished before our time. It splits into full Preterism (all's fulfilled), and partial Preterism (part's fulfilled). Preterists tend to date *Revelation* before Jerusalem's fall of AD 70. The millennial gap (Rv.20) tends to be taken as symbolism for as little as three years (Jerusalem's fall to Masada's fall), or about 100 from messiah's death until the Bar Kockba rebellion (132). Are we all post-millennials?

Preterism

Though a vision for a much later date can be sealed in cold storage (Dan.8:26), was John's vision ready to eat and not to be sealed (Rv.22:20)? Preterism seeks to interpret *Revelation* as if it is now all in the past, having anticipated the end of Nero or Domitian's wave of persecution. Is it a symbolic type of *Acts*? After all, were the Seven Churches not literal C1 churches? Were their struggles not reflected throughout *Revelation*? But the idea that it was apocalyptic, and that apocalypticism was always about its own present, and therefore it was about its own time, is specious, similar to the idea of dismissing predictive prophecy as impossible. Besides, it calls itself, prophetic (Rv.1:3; 22:7,10,18-9). Although the time was near (see the bookends of Rv.1:3 & 22:10), questions remain: was all of *Revelation*, near, and if so how near did near mean?

Historicism

This seeks to interpret *Revelation* as if it is mostly, but not fully, fulfilled—a slowly unfolding Seven Years. Beginning more or less with the Seven Churches as literally C1, and ending with Christ's return (perhaps dated, eg Miller's 1844 Return), it often charts historical events in the Western European world[5] and links them chronologically and Eurocentrically,[6] to *Revelation*. Disagreement is rife over which European events link to which scriptures. Usually Seven-Years is assumed to mean 7 x 360 days-years = 2,520 literal years, and then a start date is linked to Daniel. This arithmetical lens—no two Historicists seem to get the same sum—is committed to the idea that each step is a chronological step (eg Trumpets follow Seals), rather than following the thought of C3 Victorinus of Pettau (now Styria in Austria), that seven-fold motifs (eg Seals ≈ Trumpets) were the same theme-slot redrawn for emphasis.[7]

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5 To some extent, this is justified if Rome is truly the seat of apostasy.

6 New Eastern Orthodox (a.k.a. neo-) Historicism examines wider geography.

7 See Smalley 19.

Futurism

This seeks to interpret *Revelation* as if it is to unfold as Earth's last Seven Literal Years, and perhaps only the 7 letters to the 7 literal churches, spoke of the situation in John's days. Futurists debate as to whether the rapture will happen before *Revelation's* Great Tribulation, midway through it, or after it. But other than that, the world, as it has turned, has not turned according to *Revelation*. The final Seven Years are to be the big showdown, after which a Millennium on Earth shall be established, and then a final ending of all evil opposition. This idea tends to popularity in times of anxious politics, when the church is stressed.

Idealism

That it gives ideas often relevant under persecution, encouraging parables, so to speak, about the bigger picture/landscape truth. It does not deny that themes (*motifs*) might rise and fall, generation to generation, place to place. Reading about Bowls following Trumpets following Seals, can be read as wave upon wave, or even the same wave repeatedly shown from different angles, and the inner contradictions of a strong literalism may suggest a symbolic solution. Some add in a touch of history (Modified Idealism), such as tying down the Seven Churches to the C1, though adding that they could have extended application.

∞

"There are good and godly people in all four schools of thought. They all have insights and understandings that are valid and valuable. No doubt it is possible to hold to a combination of elements from each of them" (Chant and Pratney 128). Perhaps—though unlikely—it was fully applicable to the C1, fully applicable throughout history, shall yet be fully recapped in an intensified literal 7-year period, and experientially has been fully applicable in the life of each wave of persecution against the church. Perhaps, but unlikely. It is more likely that it had an initial C1 meaning—and a strong case can be made out for the seven letters to seven then existing churches. That may have set a prophetic pattern of similar bouts of opposition and

deliverance, and may have a 7-year future application that will in the highest meaning, usher in the reign of God.[8]

Overview

"*Revelation* is a unique, finely blended combination of three distinct literary types: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter" (Fee and Stuart 232). Apocalypse is roughly an image presentation of make-up creatures and unnatural happenings illustrating the global struggle as God's kingdom moves in. The visions and images can also speak of the same time slot (see Gen.41:25).[9] Using the style of apocalypse (rife in ethno-Jewish circles), John combined the there and then realities of he and his readers, with the prophetic openness of his vision/s (Rv.1:4,9; 2–3; 22:10).

It is usually best to speak from where we are, and to factor in historical perspective. Thus if we read that "Agabus says that Jerusalem will be destroyed by Titus", let's say that "Agabus said that Jerusalem would be destroyed by Titus"; likewise the son of man *was* lifted up, not *will be* lifted up, etc, and we behold the Lamb of God who *has* taken away the sins of the world.

Yet with *Revelation*, as regards tenses, it is not necessarily best to speak from our time gap from John's days. A kind of "he saw that, then the angels did such and such." In fact, I will pretend that we are in John's generation, as if we are more or less alongside John, and are listening to an Egyptian church leader named Sonafets. Time travel can be fun, as long as we don't change the timeline. My 'our-time' comments and notes can be read or skipped.

Several outlines have been worked into *Revelation*—an incredibly creative bit of writing of fascinating style. I have used a thematic-chiasm outline, an ABCB′A′ 'valley', where the A&B indicates climbing down, the C indicates the valley base, and the prime (′)

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8 As a young enthusiast, moving into the Futurist camp I held out for Historicism, partly in loyalty to my former denomination.

9 The 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, and 7 Bowls, might each have a rough grouping of 4, 2, & 1 (Morris 100).

after the ascending letters B&A, indicates climbing up the other side. In *Revelation*, Zion's children journey together to the base of the deceptive kingdom, then journey up and on to the heavenly Zion. But enough, let's go do some awesome climbing.

Chapter 2

Victory Guaranteed

Rev.1:1–5:14

Section A: Looking towards Visions: 1:1-20

Prologue: 1:1-3

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours, from God the father and from Jesus Christ, the father's son, in truth and love. Now I, Sonafets, as one of your bishops of this local church that our brother John has begun, will now talk you through our copy of this open scroll from him. Having had it read aloud unto you, let us reflect together on this revelation, given unto him who dwelt with hard labour, exiled on the small isle of Patmos, in body as dead to us, yet speaking. I speak not as an Egyptian, but as one whose true identity is in Christ.

After much prayer and reflection, let me share with you what this revelation says to me. Then you must reflect in the spirit. Come now, while we have wine, food, and time, let us sit and consider well what has been revealed to our brother John by our lord. In the spirit, let us consider his visions. Though my task is to unfold the folded in due order, yet mayhap I might at times jump to final things.

Now behold, a special revelation (αποκαλυψις/*apokalypsis*) came from Jesus (NIV/NLT) unto his household slaves, for John to share. Some have named it, in short, *Revelation*, as shall I. And as John has taught, so let us keep before us the distinction between sender and sent; between God and the son he sent, who as man is named Jesus.

Revelation speaks prophecies to us—the time is near. But you may ask, How near is John's *near*, for as our brother Peter said, God's near plans can seem to be delayed (2 Pt.3:8). So, are these things to unfold in our days, or in one, two, three, four, or more, millennia from now? But it is nearer for us than it was for Daniel (Dan.2:45).

This revelation speaks much of witness. John's namesake, the Baptist, bore witness (Jhn.1:7). He was a martyr, simply because the word martyr means witness (μαρτυρια/*martyria*).[10] But we can already see this word changing to imply death. For have not some witnesses already been slain, and thus become remembered? Yet John has spoken of some who surely were martyrs *before* they were killed, not *because* they were killed (see Rv.2:13; 11:7). But is it not what we witness by our lives, not whether we witness by our deaths, that counts most? Did not John say that he was, like us, a slave (δουλος/*doulos*)? Should our witness not be as slaves, as those offering complete commitment unto death, to messiah (12:11)?

I guess that John's whole revelation is for the whole church. Even as Peter spoke of Paul's writings as Scripture, I suspect that *Revelation* will be widely accepted as canonical.[11] Since most of you neither read nor write, reading this revelation to you was an honour,[12] and obeying it is likewise. But before we go much further, let me tell you in advance that the number 7 is of high significance in *Revelation*. This includes 7 *enviables* (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). I guess it's applicable to us, and to future generations if our lord tarry.

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10 For tracing the changing meaning of this word, see Carson 2002:36.

11 This term comes from κανων/*kanōn*, a Greek word for a measuring line, a standard by which to judge. Certain writings had come to be accepted within the C1 ethno-Jewish community as being God's primary words to them, and all other words were to be judged according to their standard. Some speak of Jamnia as having created this canon, but Jamnia was a council to formulate the new religion of Judaism in AD 70, and largely rubber stamped writings long accepted by their people.

12 The term μακαριος/*makarios* (Rv.1:3) is not about God adding a blessing, and might carry the idea of enviableness (presumably blessing-enriched by God). But juxtaposing *makarios* (for man) with ευλογητος/*eulogētos* (for deity) goes too far: the former sometimes applied to deity (eg 1 Tm.6:15), and the latter sometimes applied to man (eg Mt.25:34). Of special demerit, the ERV/NLT for mistranslation. Of special merit, the CEB for clear translation *favoured*/*how blessed*), and the CEV for clarifying that it wasn't about one reader, but many.

Participants: 1:4-11

> Akin to speaking of *bishops*, to speak of denominations/networks, as *churches*, muddies thinking. In this age, there is one global church, fractured into many networks, in ways (often minor) aloof from all others. The one church has millions of local churches—representative congregations networked in various ways. Jesus spoke to seven C1 churches in Asia (now Western Turkey). Today each church should hear his words. The very total, seven, indicates inbuilt symbolism—a number for fullness—along with the expression of seven spirits—as the NLT well puts it, the seven-fold, the perfect, spirit.

Brother John speaks first to seven congregations of our lord. He speaks blessing from God the father, from God the spirit, and from God the son as incarnated in messiah. In line with what I shall call trinitarianism, let us see this threeness (1:4-5), and heed the term, πρωτοτοκος/*prōtotokos*—the first to rise from the dead (NLT: 5). Let that speak to us who might be slain for him who was slain for us.

For it carries the idea, not of first to rise, whether temporally or eternally, from death, but of leadership from death: first in command. Persecution, execution, is sometimes what loyal witnesses must face. Jesus faced it, and overcame it. He was above every human institution, even if, in the bigger plan, he allowed them limited autonomy against God—for love permits rejection. His death freed us from our slavery to sin.

Our fellow kingdom sufferers of persecution/tribulation (1:4,9), are, like us, made priests by messiah unto God his father (1:5-6).[13]

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[13] The CEV/CJB/ERV/NCV/NLT replace the usual, "his god and father", by "God his father". The MEVV employ a capital G for God. However, I think it makes better sense to treat it in some contexts according to its original life setting. Where many of God's prior people assumed that he was a special god who had taken them into covenant, a small g better fits their thinking.

Nowadays, philosophical monotheism argues more clearly that there is only one god, God, and that Bible versions should better reflect this difference. I do not think the MEVV think like this for the OT. For the NT they do better, the

Though persecuted, we're privileged to worship as priests, but let's not think that the atonement was *for* God's benefit, as if, say, a harvesting of servants.[14] While we can be too creepy or cold towards the idea of redemption by *blood*, we who suffer deeply can take comfort in recalling that our lord shed his blood for us.

Alluding to Dan.7:14, John adds his happy approval that, by Jesus returning, God will ultimately abolish man's inhumanity to man (Rv.1:7). God spans the creation (Alpha) and the conclusion (Omega), even as these letters are the first and last letters in our alphabet.[15]

Next, while suffering exile on Patmos Island's penal colony with hard labour, our brother John identifies with other witnesses as a co-believer.[16] I wonder whether, by speaking of the lord's *day*, he combines OT Yahweh-days, with the new covenant weekly link of resurrection day.[17] Already we honour this day, not least as

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CEV perhaps the best to understand the problem. Based on the 15 possessive constructions in *Revelation* (*his/our/their god*), I grade the MEVV as A+ (CEV); B- (ERV/LEB/NCV/NKJV/NLT); C (NIV/NRSV); D+ (CEB); D- (NABRE).

We often confuse our monotheistic message by speaking of *our* god being different from someone *else's* god—by preaching polytheism! For the C1 context, contrasting God with a public pretence of caesar being a *god*, held some value. Nowadays we need teaching to speak with monotheism as our mother language: there is no god but God.

14 The word *serve* is interpretation in CEV/ERV/NCV/NIV/NRSV. "Priests to his god" (CEB/LEB/NKJV) would be better as "theocentric priests" or "priests unto God." We are priests, not *for* God—he doesn't need a priest—but as priests we help humanity. The priestly theme extends into the privilege of true worship.

15 We may add that God is transcendent, both trans-Alpha and trans-Omega.

16 Perhaps reference to the spirit was to indicate the revelatory nature of the Holy Spirit (Jhn.14:26): "Spirit-inspired trance" (CEB) is a possible interpretation, yet should not be confused with a demon-inspired trance state: see Steve H Hakes' *Revisiting the Challenging Counterfeit*, 2020:ch.6.

17 Richard Bauckham argued that κυριακη ἡμερα/*kuriakē hēmera* meant Sunday. He argued from near contemporary literature, that this seems to have been the settled meaning (rather than Sabbath or Easter), and that the eschatological Lord's Day was otherwise expressed and didn't fit the structure of *Revelation*,

convenient to assemble. But, I wonder, will the church ever become Firstday-centric, Solis-centred, sounding thus the dawn of the new creation, the new genesis?[18]

Christophany: 1:12-20

Then John looks to *see the voice*,[19] and sees visions. Behold he sees seven separate lampstands of gold, for each church is a centre for light within its community. The OT speaks of golden lampstands, but John's vision is distinct, not least since the *son of man* connects them. Taking Ezk.1:25-8 as **A**, Dan.10:5-6 as **B**, and Dan.7:9-14 as **C**, we can match the features of Rv.1:12-6 thus: son of man (A,C), robe (B), gold sash (B), white hair (C), [eyes like] fire (A-C), feet like bronze (B), etc. In short, Daniel's picture of a son of man as Israel robed in deity, is melded with Ezekiel's picture of Yahweh.

We know that before his death, Jesus spoke of himself as the son of man, keeping secret his messiahship.[20] Only after his death was it safe to name as messiah, he who linked messiahship to a number of OT pictures, such as humility before God (Ezk.2:1), humanity as loved by God (Ps.8), and humanity's leader before God (Dan.7:13-4). But here, does he not remind us of his hounding unto death?

Let's look at the symbolic number Seven (16). *Genesis* has the seven-day week; *Leviticus* coordinated feasts around the theme of weeks; *Revelation* speaks of the seven-fold *spirit*, seven *stars*, seven *messages*, seven *seals*, seven *trumpets*, seven *bowls*. Do not the seven stars in his right hand—biblically seven often represents a

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which covers a long historical span and chops and changes between timeframes (see Carson 1982:227—).

18 "The Lord's Day in the Apocalypse, is the day from which the Lord may reign over the rest of the week" (Carson 1982:245).

19 In ethno-Jewish apocalyptic, each divine creature was called a Voice. Had John expected an angel of Yahweh to have spoken *as if Yahweh*? Sadly some pentecostals prophesy in Christ's name *as if Christ's voice*: "I the lord say…".

20 Wilhelm Wrede classically called that, the Messianic Secret, but didn't see that the secret was not because Jesus wasn't the christ, but because ethno-Jewish nationalistic militancy misunderstood what messiahship meant: Jhn.6:15.

complete cycle—tell us that his message is for the complete church? Are we not as individuals, as assembles within the complete church over all generations and geography, his light and authority to the world?

> What did αγγελος/*angelos* (messenger), mean here? Negatively, "there is no evidence that churches had heavenly beings associated with them [as guardian angels]" (Morris 56). Positively, John's brief was to human beings and churches, not to angels (2:1, etc), and each message to each angel was not confined to one person or angel in each church! All MEVV translate 'angels', but some helpfully footnote 'messengers'.
>
> Seemingly, the primitive church had multiple oversight/bishops (επισκοποι/*episkopoi*) in each church. Did each have a secretary/lead-bishop, as its representative light/star/angel? But was addressing each local church 'angel', addressing each Christian within each local church—a corporate identity? Did inter-church letters come via secretarial oversight?
>
> (NB: Later in church history, structures changed, moving to one bishop per church, then principal bishops over multiple churches, then arch-bishops of chief capital cities (notably Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople) overseeing territories within Rome's Empire. Then an archbishop disturbingly claimed to be chief among equals: Roman papacy was conceived.)
>
> An alternate idea is that each star/angel was a light, a corporate identity: "The stars are reminders of the spiritual character of God's church, and the lamps of its material embodiment" (Smalley 58). Perhaps like Rome seven 'star' day week (Sun/Moon/Mars/Mercury/Jupiter/Venus/Saturn)—deemed its power base of seven heavenly guardians—each local church had its light addressed by messiah as his rival power base on Earth (the church), though he could snuff out any individual church (Rv.2:5).

Clearly this divine son of man is Jesus—"I was dead". As I have read to you, high Christology shines through.[21] He was and is the first

[21] "…the application to Christ of attributes of God, is a constant phenomenon in *Revelation*" (Carson 1997:1427).

and last (18), akin to God as first and last to language itself (alpha and omega: 8). Living forever and ever (τους αιωνας των αιωνων/*tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn*) is spoken of Jesus and God (1:18; 4:10; 10:6; Dan.12:7). Here John is to write for the church about what comes from the resurrected one, about things past, present, and future.

Section B: The Church Stands—responsibilities: 2–3

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. For we see that John now speaks from the resurrected one to the churches which are in spiritual warfare.

> In *Evelyn* (2002), angered with State interventionism, Desmond Doyle lashed out at Father O'Malley, only to be knocked down by O'Malley, who, being a sympathetic friend, said, "Let that be a lesson to you. Never underestimate the strength of the Church militant"! Apart from Irish humour, *ecclesia militans* is a traditional way of saying that this side of heaven, Christians have to fight spiritual opposition (Eph.6:12), yet post-mortally will be free from sin's power (*ecclesia triumphans*).
>
> There might be situations when communities as communities require military force to defend from devastating force, when pre-emptive attacks are sometimes justified, if being invaded is unjust. Much thinking has gone into the idea of Just War. Christianity has never been about forcing conversions or grabbing land—whether by conquest of by other means—nor about subjugation based on perceived inferiority of the other's religion or race. Yet the spiritual-warfare motif is justified within its framework, and is strong within *Revelation*.

John must send letters to seven large Christian outposts within his apostolic oversight (Ephesus/Smurna/Pergamum/Thyatira/Sardis/Philadelphia/Laodicea).[22] Joining the dots, we can see that they appear as roughly equal points in an oval shape, going clockwise—though an eighth church between numbers seven & one would make all distances about equal. I guess that only *seven* were chosen as

[22] Current day Western Turkey.

symbolism for the global church, and the 'gap' might even have indicated that the world can always do with more churches.

There is some interconnectivity in these letters, too, elements between them relating widely. These letters usually begin with corporate identity, some aspect of Jesus, continue with a compliment, a criticism, perhaps a warning, and end with a plea and eschatological focus. We might grade them—from church 1 to church 7—as scoring 1/5/3/3/3/5/1 for spiritual merits.[23] Are some churches super bad, some super good, and more fair-to-middling?

But whatever extended meaning there might be, from what we know of each church, as well as their geographical limitation to Asia Minor, they relate well to these seven C1 churches. That each letter (except to Laodicea) alludes back to 1:12-20, indicates global relevance throughout church millennia.

From the start, these letters will be read by all who read John's *Revelation*. We must not hide from each other, and must see ourselves and others, as Jesus does. And will not agreeing with him about the other churches, help us agree with him about our own? Of course, while particularised, the general relevancy is global, thus in speaking to the first church, this wider key is revealed by the plural term, *churches* (2:7).[24]

Local terms have often been related to its local life. Thus, Ephesus is praised for strongly rejecting Nicolaitanism—that strong local heresy. Thus Smurna, noted for its Olympic Games which awards symbolic victory crowns/wreaths (στεφανος/*stephanos*), is offered

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23 Some have reckoned that they represent successive journey stages, largely in the western sector, beginning in the C1 (Ephesus), then Smurna representing persecution, then Constantine, Middle Ages, Reformation, Missionary, Apostate (Laodicean) times respectively. This idea—my background learning—I no longer think sound. Isn't church history simply too diverse?

24 Parochialism can be too insular. We need to see that the spirit also speaks to other churches, "rich and poor, weak and powerful, secure and persecuted; to churches in America, Angola, Bolivia, Britain, Canada, Chad, China, Congo, Namibia, Uganda, Yemen, Zanzibar, and in our own backyard" (Ngundu 1549).

the true *stephanos* of life from Jesus—for spiritual life is the true Olympus. Pergamum is the regional centre of emperor worship, and Rome demands every polytheistic religionist—exempting Judaists as having a sacrosanct ethnic monotheism—to practice emperor worship as mandatory saluting of the flag. Thus Pergamum merits the term, *Satan's throne* (2:13). Thus Thyatira, which coined the term χαλκολιβανον/*chalkolibanon* for its unique bronze technology, is told that the source of true glory is Jesus (1:15; 2:18). Thus Sardis, though economically blest and sited in a highly defensible position, was twice captured through complacency, and now her Christians are in danger of spiritual capture (3:3). Thus Philadelphia, having had some special new names—Neocaesarea (thanking Tiberius) and Flavia (in memory of the Flavian Vespasian)—is offered a new name. Thus Laodicea, renowned for its black wool garments, is offered countercultural white clothing.

Now as we consider each letter, let us pretend it is our local church.

Ephesus: 2:1-7

Socially, ours is the biggest city on this church circuit, even though Pergamum is the political capital. Jesus knows our church and others. He likes it that we're dedicated to studying his message, and that we're not being misled. We're neither ethically compromised, nor spiritually gullible. But he seriously warns us not to let the message overlook the messenger—himself. For without fellowship with him, spiritually we will die. If we[25] get the balance, we'll one day enjoy the true Eden (7), which can be linked to the Garden

[25] No masculine note is intended, nor should translation suggest only one person. By and large, here the CEB/CEV/ERV/NCV/NLT/NRSV are best on gender and number, followed—a little poor on number—by the NABRE/NIV, and then—bad for both gender and number—by the LEB/NKJV. On a gender chart, MEVV Grades = A+ (CEB/CEV/NCV); A (ERV/NLT); A- (NIV/NRSV); C- (NABRE); D+ (LEB); D- (NKJV): see Steve H Hakes' *The Word's Gone Global*, 2017:186.

Note also that rewards were inclusive, not exclusive. For instance, the tree of life was not *exclusive* to Ephesus (though 2:7), but in principle was *inclusive* to all (22:14): Sardis, Laodicea, etc.

Temple of *Genesis*. I guess all Christians will know that next level of blessing, once he returns. But do you suppose he means that we're close to tasting that level of intimacy, even *before* the next level?

> In the C21, we simply do not know what the Nicolaitan belief was, nor whether they had priests. Was it some kind of religious syncretism? That can make it a handy peg on which to hang by name-calling, what we hate. For example, some KJVOphiles lambaste Christians who would honourably bury the KJV, as *Nicolaitan Priests*,[26] *Alexandrian Cultists*, *Servants of Satan*, *Idiots*, and/or the like. Thinking historically, not hysterically, it is likely that the C1 Nicolaitans were a regional bunch, and much like the Balaamites (14) and Jezebelites (20). Perhaps they had misdirected some liberty highlight of Nicolas (Ac.6:5) and moved into antinomianism: see Morris 61-2.

Smurna: 2:8-11

Even as our city died yet was rebuilt, so our lord has risen to new life. He knows that by being his, we suffer bankruptcy, vitriolic

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[26] See Rv.2:6 (practice) and v15 (teaching). It's spelt as Nicolaitanes in the Geneva and Darby EVV. Some KJVs read Nicolaitanes; some KJVs read Nicolaitans. This term has been used for different purposes by different groups. If you prefer the NU to the TR text, KJVOists might diss you as Nicolaitan, perhaps as an academic Nicolaitan priest as vile as any Roman Catholic priest (their comparison). They reckon that instead of every believer acting as a priest with their own KJV, the 'Nicolaitan Priesthood' (ie Bible translators) says it must mediate between believers and God, and interprets a false text to them—an unholy hierarchical priesthood.

This overlooks the obvious fact that most believer-priests would have difficulty reading the original Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and smattering of Latin, texts, unless translators *such as the KJV translators*, had actually weighed many varying MSS, then translated them into workable English or other native language. *If* the NIV translators are Nicolaitan Priests, *so* were the KJV translators: both groups 1# selected a reading from alternative texts, 2# put it into English, and 3# provided footnotes (see http://kjt.biblecommenter.com) of alternative readings. Mulligan's Stew—throw in various nasty terms—*Nicolaitan*, *Romanism*—and serve it up to the unwary. It works like a charm.

opposition, with fatal imprisonments to come. If we aligned with Judaism—which Rome exempts from emperor worship—we would be safe. We won't, and Judaists are highlighting to our city—which has long been extremely loyal to Rome—that since we do not belong with them, we should be treated as rebels.

Yet messiah commends us, and the ordeal will not last indefinitely. Why—however long it lasts—even Daniel had a ten day test to show that his way was the better (Dan.1:12-7).[27] Being cut off from God after physical death, is not our terminus (Rv.2:11).

> John's reference to Ιουδαιοι/*Joudaioi*, while it had an ethnic basis, should be translated as *Judaists*, the new official religion that most ethnic-Jews—and some Gentiles—bought into after AD 70. Largely it rested, as had Intertestamental Jewish Religion, on misidentifying deific salvation as ethnically coordinated. Big mistake. Jesus had rebuked some fellow ethnic-Jews for claiming God as their ultimate father, when in fact spiritually their father was the devil (Jhn.8:43-5), the deceiver. "Behind human opposition stands the more fundamental opposition of Satan, who seeks by all means to destroy the church" (Poythress 86).

Pergamum: 2:12-7

A while back, things got really tense, resulting in Antipas, a person we all knew and loved, being executed by the Roman procurator who acted as Satan's hatchet man. Wrongly, Rome thinks that those who don't worship the emperor are enemies of the State. But the true double-edged sword—the decision of life or death—is in Christ's hand: Antipas lives beyond death. We must admit, though, that in trying to be like Rome, we of spiritual-Israel have allowed some compromising practices, even as ethnic-Israel accepted Balaam's idea of intermarriage with those who insisted they integrate religions. Come on, that's spiritual idolatry—as if that hill shrine down the road, used for polytheism, is where we worship!

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[27] *Daniel*, along with *Ezekiel* and *Zechariah*, was a big background writing for *Revelation*. Opinions divide as to whether John completed their projections, or simply harvested their themes and flavour.

You know, in one sense, some of us have perhaps fallen below the Ephesian church. We've dabbled in lawlessness. What we ought to do is to rededicate ourselves to God, and vow never to compromise. *Ought* is a bigger concern than simply getting through life's journey without following Antipas to the chop! If our more holy members don't help the less holy ones to improve their holiness levels, then these Christians will find themselves on the wrong side of Christ. Individually, those who live right by Christ will see by the token in the innermost shrine—manna—that God has supported them in their exodus. And in contrast to the local pink granite which our city uses for building, Jesus will give us a richer white marble home built for us, reflecting our new individualism.

> Christian lyricist-singer Garth Hewitt sang in tribute to a former Archbishop of El Salvador: "Oscar Romero they're coming for you, you better change your tune. Oscar Romero, I think they're going to shoot, what it this faith that motivates you?" Romero was assassinated for his Liberation Ethics (woefully misnamed Liberation *Theology*)—a movement for the socioeconomic poor, rather than for Christian witness as such. There can be many good reasons why Christians ought to risk life and liberty in the pursuit of the gospel, and not change their tune. Jesus taught that we should be more concerned about God than about any who can simply snuff out mortal life. Antipas had died well.

Thyatira: 2:18-29

Fellow Thyatirans, we're the smallest city, yet we've got the longest letter, and only to us does Jesus underline that he's God's son.[28] He even knows the secrets of our city's unique bronze industry. Cutting to the chase, we've passed, even improved, on some good things, but some of us have for a long time let him down when it comes to *Jezebel*. You know, hobnobbing with paganism is spiritual adultery, for which of old banishment from the promised land was the ultimate sanction: Daniel was born when Judah was suffering for

[28] This, in *Revelation*, is the only use of this big Johannine term, which the CEB alone shortens from *son of God*. The term fits with Ps.2 of *Yahweh's son*, cited later in the letter, and emphasised by *father* (28).

such sin. *Jezebel* is a false ideology prophesying wellbeing, fulfilment, and social praise. The real prophet in Jezebel's days was Elijah, confronting her Baalism by blazing fire.

Even now (CEB/LEB/NRSV) God's son punishes some who are into this mindset, and will do in the future, unless they repent of it. Take comfort. We who have seen that sleeping with the enemy is the opposite of loyal maturity—Satan's depth, not God's—only need to hold our nerve in the face of kosmic pressure.[29] Whatever the existential battles, Jesus promises us the eschatological victory, figuratively put, when God's reign is realised on earth and when every evil structure will be wiped away. Our afflictions shall pass.

> Note that some envisage a millennium when Christians will, with Christ, forcefully quell external rebellion until it's time for freedom from it and it's ultimately banished. And some would put more existential weight on this promise, as if the tables would be turned within the mortal lifetime of those promised.
>
> There might well have been an issue that to remain in employment, one had to remain in one's trade guild, yet, if that required paganism, had one to quit their job (constructive dismissal)? To contemporise, we may think of British workers under, say, Messrs Blair & Cameron, facing banishment from their careers for fidelity to Christ, or refusing to go back into a workplace wrecked by wokeism: Western paganism is rife.

Sardis: 3:1-6

Jesus, lord to the spirit and the churches, says that some say that we're a lively little church—he says that we are spiritually dead. Though that's not nice to hear, he invites us to resurrect the earlier version of church, but if we don't, he'll bury us, finito.

On the one hand, does our shallowness provoke our pagan community's tolerance? On the other hand, does our shallowness

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[29] The underlying Greek is κοσμος/*kosmos*. I prefer *kosmic* when treating the negative sense of *wayward society*, and *cosmic* when treating neutral or positive senses, such as God's wonderful universe.

provoke our lord's intolerance? He sadly says that only a few of us don't embarrass him, but that we know how to get back on track.

Though ours is a rich church in a rich city, Jesus threatens to be the true thief, stealing away our spiritual treasure if we don't treasure it above social concerns—we won't be worth even a footnote in the Book of Life.[30] Remember that in the history of our impregnable fortress city, twice we were captured by the enemy scaling the cliff-face at night, when guards were caught off guard.[31]

Of course when Jesus says that we are dead, it's an overstatement for emphasis. But like a coma, if still breathing we must wake up.[32]

> The CEV commendably lacks god-type language (see note 13) here—though not for 3:12, which has the same Greek phrase του θεου μου/*tou theou mou* (missing from the KJV, but the CEV used the USB3). However, "I have found that you are not completely obeying God", misses a nuance that Jesus himself was obedient to God, thus a polytheistic, "my god"—or monotheistic, "God, who is mine"—might improve.

Philadelphia: 3:7-13

Rather as with Smurna, Jesus offers us praise without blame, speaks of Judaists being not God's but Satan's synagogue, and of Roman persecution.[33] But it's our own individual letter. Though we're

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30 This can be a poetical way to express the psychological truth that what we don't treasure, we will leave behind. The lord permits us to lose.

31 By Cyrus (549 BC); by Antiochus (218 BC).

32 Roman numerals work by either starting with a lower number, then subtracting it from the next—for example XM = 10 from 1,000 = 990—or staring with the higher number, then adding by the next—for example MX = 1,000 plus 10 = 1,010. Nowadays we always begin with the higher/highest, and only add on, for example, 990 is 9 x 100 + 9 x 10 + 0 x 0. Biblically the higher figure could come second, then an adjustment: dead, a little short of alive.

33 Such persecution was seldom State sponsored, but Christians were as dogs with bad names, and regional governors and local citizens often felt free to persecute at will. If there was a local flood or drought, the 'deities' must have been offended by the Christians.

troubled by the ethnicity that formerly formed God's kingdom, the true Davidide is ours, and his church is his royal nation.

Our influence may be muted by their opposition, but the corner will be turned. It will become clear that we are now the true (αληθινος/*alēthinos*: 7) Israel of God, and that they are now the pseudo (ψευδομαι/*pseudomai*: 9), a shadow of the former Israel of God: eventually they will realise it.[34]

Our king speaks of testing times for society. Doubtless its pains will kick back against us, as if we're to blame. But he says that weak as we are, we'll weather the storm even until he returns.

And do you know, we should be resilient—like athletes staying fit to win a competition.[35] And although our human city understandably fears earthquakes, as spiritual winners we'll be listed in the hall of fame, like unshakeable pillars in God's temple, part of the real Jerusalem. Isn't that how we wish to be seen by our lord and by the spirit who speaks to us?

Thinking about what he's said, in the light of old Israelite terms—for example *David*, *Jerusalem*, *temple*—the new (καινος/*kainos*) name might well allude to the new (καινη/*kainē*) covenant.

Laodicea: 3:14-22

To us alone does Jesus not hark back to his portrait of Rv.1:12-20. Unlike him, are we so unreliable as to be dropping out of the picture? To think that he couldn't think of one good thing to say about us! Do we leave so much to be desired, just like our water supply, which channelled from hot mountain springs so far away, has neither the medicinal hot springs at nearby Hierapolis, nor the richness of the cold mountain stream of Colosse, our neighbours in

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34 Sad irony is sad, yet theologically doesn't necessarily imply the ultimate damnation of all those who oppose Christianity, irrespective of their ethnicity. And throughout history, converts to messiah have come from ethnic-Jewry as well as from ethnic-Gentiles, though ironically some of True Israel have sought to merge into Pseudo-Israel (Gal.1:6), like the suffocation of a hatched chicken resealing itself within its egg.

35 The old translation of *crown*, does not mean royalty, but *medals*, *trophies*.

the Lycos Valley? Bits in this letter remind us of Paul's letter to Colosse, which we have read (Col.1:15-8; 4:16). Ah, those were good old days!

Becoming too complacent, we've fallen, thinking we're a world-class church just because of our big city life. Yes, our city is a big name in banking, healthcare, and textiles. But haven't we overlooked that we depend on others for even basic water, even when it's undrinkable?

Jesus rebukes our pride of spiritual self-reliance—we're bankrupt, dying, and naked. Spiritually we've become too hoity-toity to ask God to supply our needs. Happily Jesus loves us still, and if any of us Christians will open up, he'll come to dinner. We've got to see the eschatological prize, and heed both warning and offer.

> Let's not picture Jesus knocking on non-Christian doors! It's too easy to look at sin outside the church, and not within it. He pictured himself renewing each of us Christians who repent. And isn't this in line with Paul, who said both that Christ loves his total community (Eph.5:25), and that his love highlights each member of it (Gal.2:20)?

Section C: God's Throne Stands: 4–5

The heavenly court: 4:1-11

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Think back to how *Job*, a drama of pain, began behind the scenes, and concluded with God's wisdom and wonders. Though he had his revelation, Job was never primed, but through *Revelation*, we are. *Revelation*—having spoken to a number of our churches—and spoken of Satan's throne—now speaks more of God's throne, and by the spirit John sees he who is seated enthroned.

> Spiritualism has trumpet mediums. It is both fascinating and demonic (see Steve H Hakes' *Revisiting The Challenging Counterfeit*, 2020). But it is but a weak counterfeit to the power behind the church. Moreover, it has nothing to do with Rv.4:1 nor connection to 1:10. John heard a voice like a megaphone, shouting above surrounding sounds! Again, it seemed as if Jesus was the speaker, who then pointed to a vision of himself as God's apocalyptic lamb:

> once slain, but now victoriously alive. One might recall the epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where a younger David Bowman looks at himself at an older age, who then looks at himself at an even older age, until aided by the Monolith, he is born anew.

Our brother John now sees much symbolism of completion: *seven* seals/horns/eyes/flames/spirits (4:1,5-6). He sees God in charge, and having a big plan which he will complete. Could it be that the age of the NT church is like a new creation week, and that the ultimate resurrection we await shall be as a seventh day?

But how is the word *heaven* used here? For understand that it can be used in various ways. For example, it's God's home (3:12); it's the sky at night (6:13); it's the angelic sphere (12:7); it's earthly limitation (21:1). Here heaven's focus is God the father as being the ultimate authority. This does not mean that any evil deed has been done by his active will,[36] but it does mean that he allows evil the scope to do evil: a supreme commander might willingly allow their enemy scope in certain ways. Besides, there is a big freedom issue of allowing people personal choice even to follow an evil tyrant.

And in talking about heaven, colour and richness—such as precious stones—must be and are, big themes in *Revelation*.[37] Like a satellite, wisdom encircles God.[38] It is all so highly symbolic. John

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36 God is semi-interventional, and his sovereignty is as three overlapping circles. His will can be 1# Active (directly intervening in creation: some plans are fixed; some are fluid), 2# Allowable (creation has scope for interdependency), and 3# Advisory (he advises through such as Scripture; the spirit; indirectly conscience; indirectly common sense). Steve H Hakes' *Prayer's Gone Global*, ch.6, covers this more. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus inciderit*: When God's miraculous power is needed, seek the extraordinary; when not needed, seek the ordinary.

37 MEVV divide over what gemstones were pictured. Some of the ancient terms were less universally defined than terms nowadays, and the audit trail is cold.

38 Do the 24 πρεσβυτερους/*presbuterous* signify an inner circle of angels, the symbols of Ethnic and Global Israel (12 + 12), worship in heaven (1 Chr.25:9)? Perhaps better to say first that the vision is highly pictorial: a concentric

sees God as an electrical storm—some would say like Zeus or Set—though biblically we might recall Mount Sinai (Ex.19:16-9). An expanse like a crystal sea, surrounds—awesome paving leads to the royal throne.[39]

And what does John see by the Twenty Four *Elders*? Does he see the wisdom of the years? Now while mothers speak of infants as little cherubs, the cherubim are far from rosy cheeked. *K^{e}RûB* is of a similar root to dagger (*KeReB*). Together, these kerubim blocked off Eden's tree of life (Gen.3:24). The *k^{e}rûbim* of Ezk.1:5-26[40] were four in number, each with four faces.[41] "*Revelation* constantly utilizes earlier Scripture, but uses it creatively, in new configurations" (Poythress 105). The faces are identical in *Revelation*, but John links one face *per* kerub: lion-fierceness, bull-strength, eagle-majesty, human-sovereignty. With sweeping watchfulness, all worship God.

> Under our radars, negative ideas can piggyback on Rev.4:8-11. Is this factory production of ego-boosting praise? I mean, every time the Kerubim worship, the Elders, not to be outdone, likewise worship, and it seems that neither side ever stops! This even beats the bit in Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*, where the first to stop clapping the

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impression of tons of angels, with an inner circle of 24 (Elders representing wisdom?), with its inner circle of four, with God at the centre. God was the hub to focus on, the centre to approach, and the one to address. As symbols, it is perhaps best to picture the *presbuterous* (*elders*) as angels.

39 Some think of an enormous purification pool for priests to ritually sanctify themselves, far larger than the 14m diameter one of 1 Kg.7:23. Some think of the maelstrom of evil from which evil arises to block us off from God until the dénouement (Rv.21:1).

40 Not those of Christian fantasy writer G P Taylor! I think that Taylor (*Shadowmancer*) worked with the idea that if one could smelt down the unfallen spiritual into the physical dimension, then mould them into idols—artefacts—they could in the wrong hands be controlled, even as slaves working for evil. His creative stories can helpfully 'capture' something of the realities of the demonic and God, yet we should, as always, feed but guard imagination.

41 The *kayovt* (living entities) of Ezekiel's inaugural vision were *kerubim* (Ezk.10:15). The Greek word ζωα/*zōa* (living ones) links Ezk.1 and Rv.4.

leader goes directly to the Gulag. Does God ever stop the record looping?

But no, egotism is not God's nature. What the symbolism shows is that worship is part of the nature of the inner circles—those closest to God see best his majesty and share their vision. Awe is contagious, and always active. It can be somewhat akin to marriage, where both parties are brimming with love for the other. Irrespective of what they might be engaged in—baking, building, banking—there is their 'always-on' love in the background, even when not in the foreground. If beyond death we trek the stars—our bodies glorified and immortal—we shall revel in the playground, while at the same time having an always-on love for, and awe of, God.

Put into words, the temple awe, which Isaiah saw, is repeated. The Trihagion (thrice holy: Is.6:3),[42] is fitting for the Kerubim,[43] and 1:4 is also reflected: the eternality of awesomeness. These Elders also proclaim their part: universal glory, honour, and power, should be yielded to God its source.

Let us briefly sidetrack onto Christian songs. Firstly, often we ignore the father and spirit by our focus on Jesus, God the son as a human being. In Rv.4, Jesus was not in sight.

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[42] In Hebrew, a repeated word meant superlative (best), and twice repeated was a *super-superlative* (an infinitely best). Yahweh's holiness was/is "so far beyond anything the human mind can grasp" (Motyer 71).

[43] *Kerubim* (eg Is.37:16) are mentioned 66 or 68 times in Scripture. *Seraphim* is used twice (Is.6:2,6). I take it that such imagery as we read of angels is not their essential appearance, but selected manifestations speaking to us. Do spirits need wings to fly, or hoofs (Ezk.1:7?) to walk? Idols, statues, surrealism, could depict them, but were neither them nor their embodiments. The term *seraphim* gives the idea of burning (bright, or like snakebite?): they cried holy, holy, holy (Is.6:2-6). Do the six-wings of Rv.4:8, relate to the six-winged seraphim of Is.6:2? Do not the four faces of Rv.4:7, relate to the kerubim of Ezk.1:10/10:2? Did the kerubim simply manifest in different settings in different ways? Was *seraphim* one way that Isaiah used to describe the burning aspect of the kerubim?

Secondly, songs that speak of being worthy, often do not even bother to complete their sentiment (Incompletism). If you're told that you are worthy, you ask, "Of what?" A clip around the ears, promotion, rejection, a compliment? Are you to be left wondering what you are worthy of? In *Revelation*, we read that because of his deeds and support, the Lord God was worthy to receive the submission, the relinquishing, of human glory and honour and power (4:11). Likewise because of what the eschatological Lamb had done, the Lamb was worthy to receive our yielded power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise (Rv.5:4,9,12).

You are worthy, like, *I give him*, is an incomplete thought. If one says, "I give you", you ask, "What?". But then, for Christian songs it doesn't matter, does it, since religious verbiage goes a long way without meaning. For example, Darlene Zschech's polydirectional *Worthy Is The Lamb* (2000) has a lot of thanks and lists items of praiseworthiness, yet features a repeatedly undefined *worthy is the Lamb*.[44] Unlike Darlene, *Revelation* completes its *worthy* sentences: *worthy to* walk in white (3:4); *worthy…to* receive…because (4:11); *worthy to* open the scroll (5:2); no one was found *worthy to…* (4); you are *worthy to…because* (9); *worthy…to* (12). We live with such silly songs.

Thirdly, we should purge ourselves of the idea that we were created *for* God. God does not need us, neither for fellowship nor for servitude.[45] Sadly, the KJV followed the Bishops' rather than the Geneva, and misleadingly implies that creation was for God's *pleasure* (4:11). In C16 language, it can mean will and intention: "What is thy pleasure, sire?" The RV updated, and the NKJV

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44 Darlene of Heaven (or Hillsong?) to one side, *Crown You Now with Many Crowns* is an incomplete statement. Was it left like that because *We Crown You Now with Many Crowns* wouldn't fit the music? Also, *Worthy is the Lamb*, if sung *to* the Lamb, should be *Worthy are you Lamb*. Even so, Darlene still didn't even answer the question, "What is he worthy of?" Some of her lines might be improved by trinitarianism: is the grace *from the father* mediated by the son, and is it *the spirit* who applies (*washes by*) the blood—to use *Levitical* terms? But I do not accuse *Hillsong* of deep-rooted trinitarianism.

45 *For God* is frequent in Christian circles. I suggest a reversion to an earlier term, *unto*: we should live *unto*, but not *for*, God, as if we can *benefit* God. It's to be our prime orientation, not our *raison d'être*.

> maintains the update: God is the great planner, not the great hedonist. Then the focus moved to the Lamb.

The triumphant Lamb: 5:1-14

The next scene begins with a rhetorical look for someone suitable to carry out the father's complete seven-sealed plan (Dan.1:3-5) for humanity.[46] Is the prayer, "Your will be done on earth", impossible to achieve?[47] Behold, John weeps sore, until he sees Jesus, the only one able to carry out God's perfect plan. After all, Jesus is well placed by his obedient death, to act as an apocalyptic warrior. Both sacrificial death and militancy, are symbolised in the term, *Lamb*.

The Greek term in John's *Revelation*, varies slightly from that in John's *Gospel*. Is this because here it has a dual function, wider than the sacrificial focus in *John*? The Davidic ancestry is underlined: Yeshua is the Davidic Lion King; the Davidic Root.[48]

The link between Lamb and Throne—and perhaps a suggestion of the Holy Spirit (sevenfold spirit: NLT) with him—aligns well with trinitarianism. Here, the Lamb—along with the spirit?—shares the centre of worship (4:9-11; 5:8-9,12-4). There are signs of the Lamb's death, but the act of atonement is purely background and foundation to the apocalyptic theme, and *horns* symbolise battle, a fight to save. So, the global endgame is in sight. As the Lamb takes up this plan, the inner circles worship him, and begin a new song.

It is good to bear in mind that Jesus' death covers many things, such as his obedience, his maturity, his success, his covenant mediation,

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46 The Seals then are like web-tabs today on a menu bar: click to open each page.

47 Incidentally, Jesus taught such prayer before there were Christians. For his non-Christian disciples, God's will, as his kingdom to come, might be summarised as the messianic age we now live in (Level 3). For Christian disciples, God's will, as his kingdom to come, might be summarised as the return of messiah (Level 4).

48 *Rhiza*: *Root* (CEB/LEB/NABRE/NIV/NKJV/NRSV) probably means *descendant/heir/shoot*: see CEV/ERV/NCV/NLT, though in 22:16 it either doubles as David's source, or acts as a synonym for emphasis (CEV/Mounce). As a plant shoots out roots to sustain it, so a dynasty throws out roots to sustain it.

and his incarnational humanity. He alone can put this chapter of salvation's story—which as God's people[49] we pray for—into print. Being bought by blood (5:9), means, of course, bought by his death. Yet it also witnesses towards his death having being an objective atonement, not merely an example of love to inspire the lost to seek God. The globality of its effect is underlined, along with the priestly theme once given to Ethnic Israel (Ex.19:5-6). Nowadays we may speak of *Global Israel*. Ultimately, Global Israel, within which we belong, will be freed from the kosmic oppressors.

Hark, how all the circles around the throne sing in perfect harmony, that the Lamb deserves all human power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise, to be put at his feet, submitted to him (12).[50] Indeed, not just to the Lamb (13). And the Zōa and Elders heartily agree (14). Comparing the differences between things yielded to God, and yielded to the Lamb, might simply imply that there are many more items that could be listed.

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49 *God's people*, is usually better than *saints*. The word for holiness, ἁγιος/*hagios*, has been rendered as *saint*, but the church has sometimes detached sainthood from common Christians. From basic to best—Rv.5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7,10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9, excluding Rv.15:3; 18:20; 22:21 as textually disputed—we can read *saints* (CEB/LEB/NKJV/NRSV), to some combination of *God's holy people* (CEV/ERV/NABRE/NCV/NIV/NLT).

50 Interestingly, the Geneva, unlike the Bishops' and KJV, put ευλογια/*eulogia* as *praise*, not *blessing*, perhaps with Heb.7:7 in mind. Correct: CEV/ERV/LEB/NCV/NIV. Incorrect: CEB/NABRE/NKJV/NLT/NRSV.

Chapter 3

The Losers

Rev.6:1–11:19

Section D: Riders in Action—human focus: 6–8:1

Like website tabs can open different pages, so the seven Seals on this document opened up different pages of www.godsplan.uni. God's plan puts pressure on those who are putting pressure on his people. There is a background hope that pressure will be redemptive. For example, Sinai spoke of blessings for his obedient people, and punishments for his disobedient people, where punishments increased in severity until his people learnt that obedience was the ticket. It's not Pavlov's obedience of a dog (conditioned responses), but the love of a child, who sees that parents frown at wrongness and smile at goodness: the smile is where it's at. Indeed, Sinai divided people into categories of 1# foreigners, 2# nominal citizens, 3# committed citizens. In *Revelation*, foreigners may elect to switch from persecutor to persecuted, and citizens may elect to switch from persecuted to persecutor.[51] Though some members will perish, persecution will never destroy the church.

Retributive Judgement: 6:1-21

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. As the Lamb opens each of the first four Seals, the kerubim each in turn endorse the affliction: pain is sometimes God's megaphone of good news and retributive justice.[52]

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[51] Bear in mind that *Revelation* focuses on the black and white of the drama, not the grey in-between. In reality, many Christians are not persecuted, and many non-Christians don't persecute.

[52] *The Problem of Pain* (C S Lewis), perhaps underplays the pain thrown up willy-

And a rider rides forth (Zc.1:8; 6:1-6). Does the four-ness indicate the old generalisation of four winds, thus indicate every direction? These riders represent failure, fighting, famine, and fatality. The next two parchment-Seals are about things in heaven—the seventh is postponed. It's a bit like the Peace of Rome (*Pax Romana*), which began with Augustus in 27 BC.[53] It speaks of economic growth within, rather than growth by conquest. So, do the Riders say that human society can't enjoy perpetual ease and affluence; that human society is at heart unstable?

Many in the Empire boast in their divinities yet reject deity and the Lamb. Not repenting, they persecute us for undermining 'the gods'. In turn we may plead for true justice (6:10), and let us be clear that God's not persecuting us—his blind enemies are.[54] Many, pursuing their own selfishness, can achieve ends that God will turn for our ultimate good (Gen.50:20).

First, we have the White Rider. The Lamb opens this one of seven parchment Seals, and a kerub summons this rider. For simple battle, leaders often ride distinctive white horses, but it's not the White Horse we long for, not yet (19:11). Since Parthia rather than Rome is famed for archery, perhaps our brother John sees an invasion into the Roman world. Next comes the Fiery Red Rider. There's blood and fire now, devastation and confused infighting. This leads on to the Black Rider. Is that a merchant on horseback? Luxury goods might be fine, but afflicted by war, many can only afford basic rations.[55] For basic workers are paid but a denarius a day, which inflation can erode to just about cover survival rations—

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nilly by fallen nature. It is good to realise that not all is right with the world, but to spiritually mature, we don't always need to experience pain.

53 It died with Marcus Aurelius in AD 180.

54 We need not assume that every situation is by God's specific design. Of many arrows shot, perhaps he only uses one, yet for the ultimate good he permits sin though that leads to all wars. Arrows of outrageous fortune can harm us.

55 Consider how if war limits fuel, some must choose between fuel and food.

I see many living hand to mouth.[56] Then comes the Corpse Rider. Yes, when things can't get worse, Death and Hades party (Ezk.14:21).

Such things are of course the common realities of human society, being out of sync with God. Superficial society should seek the deepest reality, God—though he is best manifest in Christ. The next parchment Seal reveals Christians martyrs. As you know, the term *martyr* is coming to mean witnesses *who have been executed*. Still, around the Roman Empire, persecution is usually patchy rather than systematic. And as a rule, quiet Christians are usually safe-harbour Christians. Yet as one of our poets says, "I must choose between the safety of the shadows and the land, but to walk upon his water, is to live, but here upon the shore I drown".[57] While martyrs' bodies have perished, they as souls are in heaven. Does the symbolism of them being 'under the altar', mean that they are dead to us? The world might deem them 'dead', but God deems them more alive than ever.[58]

And such slain souls cry out for justice. But, you may ask, should we not bless, rather than curse, our enemies? Yes indeed, and our lord commanded us to bless even those who persecute us. Yet on the other hand, is it not right to desire justice as well as mercy, justice for those dismissive of mercy (Jr.18:10)? Jonah was in the wrong, for having announced justice on his people's tyrants, he resented the mercy shown after they repented (Jr.18:8). Nor is self-revenge sought, but only due deserts, once every allowance has been allowed for excuse, and every possible offer of mercy has been

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56 Opposing the Senate, Domitian tried in vain to replace vineyards with cereal crops for distributive justice.

57 Actually paulfield.bandcamp.com/track/black-notes-white.

58 Some theologians picture hell as the temporary place of *the dead*, that is, of those cut off from God who await judgement. I am less sure about that. In one Narnian story, Aslan says that the vast majority of people, including himself, have died. People being *dead-to-us-mortals*, and *having died*, is best framed within Christian revelation, and Billy Graham was right to say that he'd be more alive after his death. Perhaps terms such as *passed on*, *deceased*, better fit the facts. Paul contrasted being dead to sin but alive to God (Rm.6:11).

declined. Would we have self-deluded tyrants laughing throughout mortal life, let alone throughout eternity; having butchered their fellow man, should they forever laugh? Those who won't lament the butchery done, should lament the punishment received. May they see the big picture, perhaps the redemptive door.

Sentence is Yahweh's, and he will sort out evildoers (Dt.32:35). Yes, his kingdom will fully come, he will deliver us from the evil one, and order shall defeat chaos. But even the tasters now of what will be, are wonderful. The saints in heaven plead for the saints on earth,[59] who face death by God's enemies. So we are not to encourage our execution. Do you know, fallen society has peak and trough times for killing us, and after the fullness of its gluttony has been satisfied, its hatred will abate. That's not to say we shouldn't complain within society. But having done all that is righteous complaint, we can simply ride out whatever bad weather befalls us in our time. For now, the reply is 'Patience'! The white robes (Rv.6:11) probably signify an assurance of ultimate victory, rather than personal righteousness as such. This Seal offers a gift of patience to Christian martyrs.

Seal 6 highlights the spiritual injustice by God's enemies. Now I see their dread, though John may speak through the hyperbole typical of apocalyptic language. Symbolically, *seven* types of people are mentioned (15). Man's heaven and earth are shaken, and behold, suddenly human society is gripped within a hand of fear, and what has seemed secure now flounders without resource.[60]

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59 6:11: also 12:10; 19:10; 22:9. I've looked for either a feminine in the text, or at least for a neuter without a masculine-only footnote. MEVV Grades = A+ (CEB/CEV); A (NIV, with ageist footnote); A- (ERV/NCV/NRSV); B- (NLT); C- (NKJV, slightly concealed sexism); D- (LEB/NABRE).

60 See Morris 108. We can mention banks, and a lot worse calamities can be faced in a society so dependent of limited resources. The more we are tied in to limited pathways (electricity, the internet), the more vulnerable we become by their disruption. The C1 Roman Empire was not exempt from catastrophes causing panic throughout the social classes, and the temptation to bury their heads in fear. Those who look beyond the kosmos, can look to such as Is.54:10.

The True Church Stands: 7–8:1

Identity of the church: 7:1-8

In all the hustle and bustle of God's wrath upon the kosmos, his own will be marked out (sealed) for some protection, as in the exodus from Egypt. Sealed in (see Ex.12:23; Ezk.9:4.)—that's a mercy. In this black and white world, we face either the world's anger, or God's. Spiritual alignment, *taking sides*, is fundamental. Of course in the eschatologically hidden grey world, many have divided loyalties, moving either towards or away from the kosmos.

Spiritual warfare fights both sides. For we—in messiah being as True Israel—stand in army array on our apostolic foundation, and are humanly uncountable. What a vision our brother has given us.

> One from Brethrenism said that "the followers of Christ are here viewed as the true 'Israel of God'" (Bruce 1609). Yet ever since the Brethren began, an increasingly influential idea has circulated that John referred to two groups, namely Global Israel (the messianic church) and Ethnic Israel. From Brethrenism can be traced the C19 international motivation to repatriate ethnic Jews to Palestine, even though Judaists had no religious motivation to repopulate their former haunts.
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> Many Christians simply side with the reformulated State of Israel, even seeking spiritually redundant animal sacrifices to be resumed.[61] Whether or not Ethnic Israel (Ethnic Jewry) is in the right, she is deemed to be in the right land, and to be a prophetic pivot to Christ's return. Such Christians divide over whether she ought to be evangelised. The earlier idea of an alternative salvation road for Ethnic Israel, has perhaps been reconsidered in the light of many ethnic Jews who have become 'messianic'.
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> This position has some puzzles. For instance, if 7:3-10 is about two groups, why are only ethnic Israelites (7:3) protected? I've moved away from that position. The revelation about Jesus as messiah, has been open to all ethnicities, and the role of the special ethnicity

61 Some now say that red heifers stand ready to be sacrificed in a rebuilt temple, allowing Jesus to return

that carried the messianic seed, has been superseded in triumph as the chaff is thrown heavenwards.

Though Abraham was a good choice, are ethnic Jews eternally damned because God has now hardened their people group as a people group (Rm.11:7)? No. Otherwise we must hold that the bulk of humanity before the cross—once upon a time hardened as Ethnic Israel now is—were eternally damned. Bing hardened carries the implication of not being in God's core plan—sidelined.

Spiritually the church has best claim to the title *Israel*, the umbrella term of God's core plan. Essentially Israel is a thematic hat, once for an ethnic head, transferred by the cross to a different head. We can trace it through Jacob, to his Twelve son-tribes, to messiah, and finally to messiah's community (see Rv.2:9; 3:9; 21:2,12). Morris gave a brief résumé of some pointers. "The church is referred to as 'the twelve tribes' (Jas.1:1; see Mt.19:28; Lk.22:30), and this is probably the thought when a letter was sent to 'the Dispersion' (1 Pt.1:1). Christians appear to be true Jews (Rm.2:29) and the church 'the Israel of God' (Gal.6:16). Description of old Israel were piled up and applied to the church (1 Pt.2:9; see Eph.1:11,14). It is the church which is God's 'very own' people (Tts.2:14), and 'the circumcision' (Php.3:3). Abraham is the father of all who believe (Rm.4:11); again these are Abraham's children (Gal.3:7). Many hold that 'Israel after the flesh' (1 Cor.10:18) implies an 'Israel after the Spirit'" (Morris 112).[62]

The 144,000 figure "is obviously symbolic. Twelve (the number of tribes) is both squared and multiplied by a thousand" (Mounce 158). Few disagree with this bit. More contentious is the claim that the 144,000 contains the idea of the messianic community being the fulfilment of Sinaitic reunion prophecies,[63] and forming Yahweh's army, which—the other side of the coin—is beyond human count. There are various ideas about the order of tribes, though in the OT there is a general disorder of sequences, and in some lists tribes were left out, or split into two: an example below. There were some

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62 Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, 1994:859-63, put this extremely well.

63 Dispensationalism expects a literal reunion only the end of this age. Less hopeful, "one strain of Jewish tradition held that the ten tribes would never be restored (b. Sanhedrin 110b; 'Abot de Rabbi Nathan 31b)" (Beale 419).

extrabiblical lists, too (for example C1 LAB (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, aka *Pseudo-Philo*) 25:4).

Jacob's tribes[64]												
Gen.35	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Gen.46	1	2	3	4	5	6	9	10	7	8	11	12
Ezk.48	11	10	12	7A	7B	1	4	8	2	5	6	9
Rv.7	4	1	9	10	12	7A or 11	2	3	5	6	7	8

Perhaps the biggest feature is an apparent absence of Dan. A textually possibility is that John wrote 'Dan', which the first copyist, working in haste, accidentally put as 'Man' (an abbreviation for 'Manasseh' and soon 'expanded').[65]

A theological possibility throws up the question of why—since Joseph was listed—one of Joseph's two split-tribe sons, was listed too. Theologically some reckon that any way to drop Dan works fine, since, they say, Dan's is to be the 'antichrist' tribe. Here they develop a term never actually used in *Revelation*. But this stems from a late C2 idea of Irenaeus, plus special pleading to fit what Irenaeus thought to be a fact of absence.

Irenaeus was a little too eager to slam down Dan. Sure, Gen.49:17 might be negative, but if it is, is Gen.49:19 any better? Why blame Dan for foreigners invading through Dan's uninhabited land (Jr.8:16)? Dan refused to fight the good fight, yes, but so did Asher (Jg.5:17). Jeroboam established an idol in Dan, and also in Ephraim (1 Kg.12:29). It seems hard on Dan to be singled out for special demerit, when compared to the other tribes: all had warts. I think that Irenaeus' argument "founders on the fact that Dan was included in the salvation of the eschatological people in Ezekiel 48"

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64 Key (using Gen.35:23-6's sequence): [1 = Reuben]; [2 = Simeon]; [3 = Levi]; [4 = Judah]; [5 = Issachar]; [6 = Zebulun]; [7 = Joseph]; [7A = Manasseh]; [7B = Ephraim]; [8 = Benjamin]; [9 = Gad]; [10 = Asher]; [11 = Dan]; [12 = Naphtali].

65 This raises the concept of God's preservation of the text. Having birthed *Revelation* into the human domain, did he allow any glitch to overwrite the autographic witness without trace? At least usually, perhaps always, transmission of authentic text is evident in the manuscriptal records. Is it possible that after Irenaeus, any trace was intentionally dismissed as heresy?

(Ladd 115)? There are other suggestions as to why Dan might have been excluded.

Let's move on. The symbolism suggests equality (all 12,000) between the tribes, counted, as in *Numbers*, to assess the fighting force of God's people. Let it be immediately said that "we use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments" (NLT: 2 Cor.10:4). (Too much Gun and Gospel has been used to civilise the world, that is, to give it our culture and Christ—ah the human itch for uniformity.)

In John's poetical style—apocalyptic—the contrast was between two worldviews/kingdoms: the unfallen and the fallen. And the point was that God's people were like an army that, defeatable in battle, was not ultimately defeatable (see Mic.7:8). There is thus a military link: that of *Numbers* was thus, and Rv.14:4 seems to likewise look to the men-only army, which practiced cultus celibacy in times of war. Hence there is reference to cultus purity, during wartime, for the men in it (Dt.20; 23:9-10; 23:9-14; 1 Sam.21:5; 2 Sam.11:9-13; 1QM 7:3-6). That is, spiritual purity symbolised by cultus purity, perhaps also a link to OT idolatry as spiritual fornication (see David H van Daalen's *A Guide to Revelation*, 1986:126): see 1 Jhn.5:21.

Though some assume otherwise,[66] this indicates neither misogyny, male Christian chauvinism, nor lifelong celibacy. It is indicative in the NT as Christian dedication, whatever one's age and sex. Ethnic-Jewish expectation was of an eschatological Ethnic Israel army, brought together at the end of the age to defeat the Gentile foes. In *Revelation*, it was of a multiethnic people under the Lion of Judah, opposing a global worldview. "Just as 5:5-6 depicts Jesus Christ as the messiah who has won a victory—but done so by sacrificial death, not by military might—so 7:4-14 depicts his followers as the people of the messiah who share in his victory—but do so similarly, by sacrificial death rather than by military

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66 For example, a documentary on serial killer Ed Gein, portrays his dominant mother as having raised him on a twisted form of *Revelation*, which asserted that most women were sexually immoral—so stay away son. Crazy ideas can inspire crazy people, and can also *come from crazy people* twisting the truth. *Abusus non tollit usum.*

> violence. This interpretation is confirmed by 14:1-5, in which the 144,000 reappear…. In 14:1 the Lamb and his army stand together to oppose [their enemies] on Mount Zion, the place of the messianic king's triumph over the hostile nations" (Bauckham 78—tweaked). The symbolic count shows Global Israel's structure (the church painted in Ethnic Israel colours), and the true count as beyond human counting. *Israel* has been redefined by God.

Content of the church: 7:9–8:1

Yes, the church transcends all ethnic divides whether Gentile or Jewish. It is a belief-welcome platform. Its unique identity stands before both God and the Lamb (Rv.7:9). To them we sing our song, that salvation ultimately comes from God—to whom we belong through the Lamb. Totally agreeing, the angels add their own panegyric. John, joining that close orbit around God,[67] spoke of lamb's blood making clothing white. Now that paradox is challenging, even for John.

I prayed for, and perhaps was granted, revelation here. Basically, those wearing the robes represent those who have come out of the great persecution, having gone through a purifying process. Of course we know that 'blood' sometimes stands for 'death', the atoning death of messiah. It's ironic, that though anyone slaughtered usually looks bloody and beaten—as messiah did upon the cross—those slaughtered as Christians stand triumphant in unsullied white, enrobed rather than embattled.[68]

> This could mean [the] great persecution, characteristic of the world's persecution over 'millennia' sometimes in the foreground, sometimes in the background, yet already having begun a church of executed martyrs in John's days (see 2 Ths.1:5-6; 2 Tm.3:1,12). The beheading atrocities to Egypt's Coptic Christians by Muslims—one example among many—are probably characteristic of Christians oppressed in John's times. But do only the battered

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67 A simple picture style conveys message, but is not the full reality. God is omnipresent, not a limited centre.

68 Likewise Eustace, Jill, and Tirian, were transformed from battle stains to being cool and fresh the other side of the Stable Door (Lewis 1980:126).

for Jesus, get this blessing? If apocalyptic is rephrased in general theological terms, we may say that no Christian will be disadvantaged for not having gone through a fiery trial, though diminished blessings may follow cowardice in the face of fire.

John's point was simply that for the joy that is set before us, it's a privilege to gladly bear any Christian sufferings forced upon us (see Heb.12:2). The issue is commitment to the Lamb. John then examined this joy. It is a joy of knowing God directly, and worshipping (λατρευω/*latreuō*) him constantly.[69] By *worship* is meant deep enjoyment, amazement, wonder, awe, insight, understanding, and meaning—mere purpose might have vanished. Life beyond the mortal pains of hunger, thirst, heat, and tears other than of joy. Life's positive joys are as a parched sheep finding a permanent source of finest water (Rv.7:15-7).

Seal 7 is broken (8:1), and...silence. We stand is awe with baited breath. What will come next? Like a play ending on a cliff-hanger, we must wait. We now switch to the picture of military commands—Trumpets[70] passing out orders to heaven's armies.

Section E: Angels in Action—nature focus: 8:2–11:19

Humanity is Sinful: 8:2-9

The Seven stand ready: 8:2-5

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. More than a thousand years before this vision, Joshua[71] had led about 5,000 or more soldiers[72] against

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69 From an artist's perspective, the picture about a temple conveys the general idea, even if a further picture uses the absence of a temple to express God's ultimate, non-mediated connection to us. It's a case of a good picture (Rv.7:15) being surpassed by a better (21:22).

70 Completely unrelated to Spiritualism, incidentally.

71 Though we differentiate the spelt name between Joshua—Moses' servant—and Jesus—God's son—in the Heb/Aram/Gk., the spelling is identical. Mt.1:21 contrasted the mission of one Joshua, to that of another Joshua, one exodus (from human slavery), to another exodus (from sin).

72 Calculations based on the Hebrew text and ancient style, suggest a minimum of 5,000 adult men.

Canaan's gateway town of Jericho, a semi-fortified town close to the ruins of the previous Jericho. There, seven trumpet days had preceded Israel's victory. We see now seven angels ready to blow seven trumpets, allowing entry to Ultimate Canaan-Israel. Are they symbolic of angels being completely involved in the complete judgements and warfare of God?[73]

But before they blow their war horns, one angel links the martyrs with God and with the world. In Lv.16:13, the censer smoke was probably to symbolically protect the High Priest from Yahweh's full radiance, even as one may hold dark glass before the eyes to protect from the sun's radiance. Perhaps here we see an angel protected from God's full glory, even as in *Isaiah* the closest covered their eyes—and wasn't Isaiah's view also partially obscured (Is.6:2-5)?

Yet the big idea here is surely both that the martyrs have pleased God, and that there's good ground—namely earth's bloodthirsty bunch—for judgements to rain down on earth. Thus the incense censer is used for different yet related tasks.

The Seven at work: 8:6–9:21

Trumpets 1-4: 8:6-13

Now we see the angels getting to work, as John busily takes notes. Might we best say that John was painting pictures, not writing literal prose?[74] The first vision looks like a massive electrical storm, surrounded by blood-red dust-storm light—apocalyptic hue? Will the streets literally run red with blood? The aftermath is that a significant minority of woodland resources, along with its grass, has been destroyed—is this the scorched earth policy of invaders?

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73 See also Rv.8:6; 15:1,6-8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9. Intertestamental Jewish Religion invented extra names to fit the idea of completion, listing thus Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Raguel, Remiel, Saraqael, and Uriel. Those Christian networks having a list of seven—predicated on IJR—normally agree the names of Gabriel & Michael (both canonical), Raphael & Uriel (both noncanonical), but differ over the remaining three.

74 See Morris 122.

With the second Trumpet comes devastation at sea, like an asteroid plummeting down. Well, that rocks! Whatever is happenings, our sea trade's taking a hammering, with loss of human life.

Nor are landlubbers safe when the third Trumpet sounds. Some judgment from God sickens a significant minority of rivers, which become bitter, even deadly.[75] So living at sea isn't safe, and living on land isn't safe. And even the skies aren't safe, as the forth Trumpet sounds. To enemies who look for dawn, things get even darker—will they turn to God? Do you remember the judgments on Egypt, which included hail and fire, blood-red waters, darkness?

Trumpets 5&6/Woes 1&2: 9:1-21

As we look up, we see an eagle able to scan beyond our horizons. Rome with its eagle badge—used to symbolise its armies and announce woe to many—lacks the angelic Eagle. Many would call its eagle a vulture! John's prophecy announces woe to God's enemies (see Am.5:18; 6:1). But why does this follow four Trumpets? Might this be an emphasis on things still future? And is there a difference between general, and targeted, attacks? After all, Trumpet 5 specifically limits the attack to, shall we say, non-Israelites (9:4), the spiritual Goyim?[76] We Christians are exempt from God's wrath (4; see 14:1), and incidentally, being of the messianic community are God's Israel for today. God's Mark on us

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75 The 'star' has been named *Wormwood*, a name used in several stories since. The Greek αψινθος/*apsinthos* basically means *bitterness*—this event was of great bitterness.

76 Some suggest so, but the marker might be random. The only explicitly selective Trumpet is number 5 (Rv.8:23), which approximates to Plague 8 of Ex.10:1-20—locusts—which lacks explicit selection. Neither Trumpets 6 nor 7 are explicitly selective, and in *Exodus* explicit selection is only for Plagues 4 (Flies), 5 (Livestock), and 10 (Inheritance sons). By and large, both *Revelation*'s Trumpets and *Exodus*' Calamities, imply the distinction. When many arrows are fired, it is likely that many Christians will so perish, even if the main suffering is outside the church. *Revelation*'s point may be that, even though Spiritual Israel may suffer alongside Spiritual Goyim (collateral damage), anti-Christians may have redemptive hope: some Egyptians joined the exodus.

is about his lordship, even as contrawise the Beast's Mark is about the Beast's lordship (eg 14:9).[77] Like the Parchment judgements, the first four were about nature, about infrastructure, and the last two or three Trumpet woes will affect people directly.

Anyway, Trumpet 5 tells a heavenly messenger to let evil run amok on a non-killing rampage—though killers at heart would prefer even more freedom.[78] In one sense, evil powers are a bit like locusts, which small but devastating, spend the whole of their 5-month lifecycle in one place (5), bypassing their usual food search in order to annoy evil people. In another sense, they are a bit like scorpions, perhaps not sending to hell, but certainly inflicting the pain of hell.

What is pain? On a chilly day I enjoy a log fire, but if I get too close, my feelings turn from pleasure to pain. It's just the way we are. We all experience pain, in body and mind, but woe to those who suffer outside the context of meaningfulness, outside of God. These torments seem to be a jumbled confusion, a yearning to die—but death merely laughs. Small wonder, when you consider that their leader—the destroyer bent on destruction—rules the underworld: though big in pride he's only given a minor part in the big picture.[79]

Next, listen to Trumpet 6. It sounds, and the trumpeter awaits the affirmation to release a wave of devastation—presumably by demons, those fallen and earthbound angels. The River Euphrates is just outside the Roman Empire's limits, and is where the dreaded Parthian Empire lives—they've got the world's most dreaded

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77 Arguably, as with the Beast's mark, God's seal is invisible to human sight, being the invisible allegiance of the heart. The Beast's mark is mentioned 6 times (NU/MT)—or 7 times if the TR's addition (15:2) is added to the count.

78 'Star' will mean angel/messenger, as in 1:20. While 'fallen' translates correctly, 'descended' was the meaning in some contexts. Interpretations range from Satan to Jesus. I suggest a meaning of angels giving demons more slack: what demons mean for evil, God intends for good (Gen.50:20).

79 He was also given a part by John Bunyan: see Steve H Hakes' *Revisiting The Pilgrim's Progress*, 2021, ch.15.

cavalry, and are a power well outside of Rome's control. The number of demons—four—may signify inescapable attack from every side.

This message seems to pan out as human invasion—an impossibly overwhelming cavalry of 200 million, considering the global population—men, women, and children—which outside Rome's Empire, is only about 300 million at most.[80] The fierceness is pictured as horses' heads like lions' heads, dragon-lions, mind you. They are as destructive as cavalry leaving scorched land in their wake. As with Trumpet 5, so again the unnatural jumble of it all—horses' tails being like snakes, snakes with a sting in their tail! If you think that to survive a cavalry charge, is to survive, think about Parthian arrows shot behind as their horses charge past!

But still, it's only a significant minority who are directly affected. It seems that everything has come in thirds: to a third of the trees; a third of the seas; a third of the living creatures and ships; a third of the rivers and springs; a third of the waters; a third of the sun, moon, and stars; total blackout for a third of the day and night (8:7-12). Now, as the vision unfolds, at an exact time to the very hour, a third of mankind are being killed (9:15,18).[81] In God's timing—his plan—there is significant exposure to the powers of darkness. Is he seeking to wake a sinful world from its rebellion, to knock some sense into it? Yet I see no wholesale repentance—but not for want of trying. Alas, spiritual folly—and its related social sins—carries on as normal (20-1). Isn't that just how it is? That sin is deep-dyed, as is its bitterness towards God's people?

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80 In the C21, some have linked this number to China, and postulated a communist attack on the State of Israel.

81 There is an Open-God (panentheism) teaching, namely that God evolves in time, and merely reacts to unfolding events. This idea seems to protect God from the charge of not preventing sins, while highlights his benign reactions to sin. But John seemed unaware of it. Some have felt a soteriological need to postulate it: I see their point; I do not accept their point; I do not postulate it.

Yes the True Church Stands: 10–11:14

A messenger with a message: 10:1-11

In some ways, this next messenger looks like Jesus, yet there are some differences. We know that the angel that Jacob wrestled with was in some ways like God, and in some ways like a man.[82] Here too this angel brings a strong sense of God and the Lamb. He exudes superhuman strength, and, spanning sea and land, signifies God's control over both. A short scroll—the very word βιβλαριδιον/ *biblaridion* (a diminutive of the diminutive βιβλιον/*biblion*) possibly coined by John—is put on permanent display (10:2).[83] Listen as he reads words of power and shouts aloud. And like a perfect storm, there is a perfect reply. Seven thunders speak as one. But for now we mustn't say more than that soon, God's secret plan will be completed (ERV: 7).[84] Haven't the prophets long announced that our world ultimately will be purged of evil rebellion, and will know harmony? The kosmos removed from the cosmos?

But listen again. A Voice has just commanded John to take what is now called a *bibion*, though we're immediately reminded of its smallness (8-9).[85] God's policy is global and is good news to John, but he is also grieved at heart because of the judgement that evil calls upon itself, and inflicts on others. We may all taste both God's sorrow at having to condemn the evil, and his joy in righteousness.[86]

The Two Witnesses: 11:1-14

Wow, we've seen so much symbolism so far.[87] Now, overall, the picture is of the messianic church as God's holy city, opposed by the

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82 Perhaps too quickly, some speak of a preincarnate Christophany.

83 We might even say the angel had been texted. Only the NKJV calls it a book.

84 The KJV's "no more time" (6), instead of "no more delay", has led to confusion, not least that Earth (and even the universe) will be no more.

85 Some MSS have harmonised v8 to vv2&9.

86 Some think that this is of the persecuted church.

87 Some dismiss this section, saying that it was built on two Jewish expectations,

city (worldview) of darkness. In apocalyptic style, splitting a perfect period—seven years—was just how Daniel spoke. Perhaps within God's leeway, Antiochus oppressed earthly Jerusalem for 3½ years.

Why *two* witnesses?[88] Well, the term *lampstand* has been used for local churches, but only Smurna and Philadelphia got high marks. Perhaps only a few churches/Christians will risk martyrdom in the face of opposition. If that's the case, it might link in with limited persecution (11:2)—why should the world waste time on persecuting Christians who are worldly?[89]

Does the idea of two olive trees hark back to Zc.4, where Jewish leadership, royal and priestly, stood before Yahweh? There the prince was told that in rebuilding the temple he would succeed by Yahweh's spirit, not by his own strength nor by his own power. And that's true enough. The church at heart must rely on God's *oil*, that is, his spirit. Thus shall its witness silence opposition (Rv.11:5-6), in offence and defence, with a hint of charismatic power (Rm.15:19).

Under the sun there is a time to live, and a time to die. In deep lament, the witnesses grieve over the darkness of the kosmic mindset. After making their mark, the Beast—human ideology—gains the upper hand. Their message is trampled; their *body*[90] is

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both of which had failed by the year AD 70, and were irrelevant to John's message. Some prefer a very literalist interpretation.

88 Many 'names' are given, such as Moses and Elijah (11:6), though perhaps as individuals representing them, even as the Baptist was the prophesied Elijah.

89 Today I see some good Christians on messiah's side, who deny that any on the world's side can be Christians, that Bad Christian is an oxymoron. I demur. Worldly agreement can be based on fear, even actual conviction (Rm.12:2).

Imagine I'm taught in pagan years from a pagan school—incidentally not all pagans have taught this (eg Hippocrates)—that unscientifically an unborn is but a blob in a woman's body (*her* blob), rather than a distinct yet dependent human being within her home. Imagine that in adult years I become a Christian. Is it likely that I immediately become prochoice, and assume that baby chooses to live? Is conversion short of sinless perfection, to be denied?

90 Ungrammatically singular—one body—highlighting their united witness. Some Bible versions read *bodies* by selecting the wrong text, or by simplifying text.

mocked. A non-Christian world, typical of Sodom and Egypt of wickedness and oppression[91], has a similar disposition to that which crucified Jesus in the pre-Christian Age.

But, as was with Jesus, an unexpected resurrection will follow. Do you know, even the gates of hell cannot kill off all trace of messiah's people. Aren't we being shown that the crackdown we're facing—such as John being exiled—can at worst merely dampen our witness for a while?[92] Will a cycle of witness/suppression/resurgence (3½ years on, 3½ days off), continue until Jesus returns?

Christian resurgence results in kosmic amazement, but with limited appeal (12).[93] The amount of deaths is unclear (13), but might allude to 1 Kg.19:18/Rm.11:4—there 7,000 refused to worship Baal, and survived. Here, is it like 7,000 insist on worshipping Baal—and die? Does this symbolise that the die-hard opposition will eventually be quelled, leaving the population at large to rethink its opposition?[94]

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91 See Morris 146.

92 Evidence is clear about Nero murderously persecuting Christians as Christians, who initially got little sympathy from the average Roman. Sometimes some emperors went out of their way to persecute Christians as Christians, but usually provincial policies were sometimes kinder, sometimes crueller. Christianity had no State legitimacy in those days, so Christians were often easy targets since standing against political correctivism—even as Nazis could fill their coffers by robbing ethnic Jews, once the latter were politically damned. To what extent Domitian supported terrorism against Christianity, is moot. But soon after him, Pliny the Younger rightly assumed that Emp. Trajan was happy enough for genuine Christians to face the chop.

93 *Not to hear* heaven's voice (Ac.22:9), means to misinterpret it as background noise. What was to Jesus clear, was to many clamour (Jhn.11:28-9). Arguably, only the witnesses—not the kosmos—heard their commendation.

94 Here, note that most folk are probably a light, middling, or dark, shade of grey. With its ultimate focus, *Revelation*, factoring in eternity, usually treats the light-greys as white, and the dark-greys as black, the ultimate polarisations that all trajectories lead to (Poythress 129-30).

Joy in Heaven: 11:15-9

Trumpet 7/Woe 3?: 11:15-9

It's like we're going in circles—or cycles. Just before Seal 7, came a dramatic pause (8:1). Now, voices. Will we get to the third Woe?[95] Will we get to the seventh Trumpet? Like Sisyphus, will we never summit? And then Trumpet 7 seems to take us into another cycle of seven, even as did Seal 7. But perhaps better, we behold now a wonder, not a woe. What we see now is the final war Trumpet with woe seemingly skipped and God's victory glimpsed.[96]

In this worship, unlike with Paul the term *lord* is used for God, who ultimately is lord.[97] For all its diversity in evil, we see the world which once seemed to be united in rebellion, at last rescued by God. It's as if the true Davidic king is at last enthroned (Ps.2:2). It's as if from awesome phenomena (Rv.11:19), God's covenant kingship has become global, and the covenant box—that reminder of covenant joys and duties—finally hits the public domain without mediation. Then our preview switches to the historical.

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95 Rv.8:13 seems to imply numerically three Woes, for a first and a second are linked to Trumpets 5 and 6. But the seventh/final Trumpet is not explicitly linked to a third/final Woe. Is this Woe simply implicit in 11:18-9? If not, is it located in 12:12, in the underlying current of Rv.16, or symbolically missed?

96 Even better than youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR90KVE !

97 "So likewise the Father is lord, the Son lord, and the Holy Spirit lord. And yet not three lords, but one lord" (Athanasian Creed). The father is the ultimate lord; the son is the strategic lord; the spirit is the tactical lord. However, I make the case that for us, keeping *lord* for God's son, can help us return to devotional trinitarianism (Steve H Hakes' *Singing's Gone Global*, 2016:ch.4). So perhaps if you hear someone praying to the 'lord' when their context seems to you to be God, quietly as a whisper or within, replace their 'lord' with your 'father', to decontaminate your prayer life.

Chapter 4

The Winners

Rev.12:1-6

Section F: The Redeemed Stand: 12:1-6

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Next we see two signs (σημεια/*sēmeia*), two significant depictions.[98] Israel, is like a woman dressed in dazzling sunshine;[99] Satan, is like a red dragon. The symbols of sun, moon, and stars, express the idea of brightness (Ezk.32:7; Jl.2:10; Mt.24:29). Israel shines with heaven's glory. And though the dragon causes significant global damage in a mean-spirited little way, he cannot harm Israel herself—is she not God's Plan.[100]

Besides, he's only after the woman's baby (Rv.12:4; Mt.2:13)—an unfruitful Israel doesn't bother him. However the dragon fails, and messiah who was prophesied to firmly (not tyrannically) shepherd the cosmos, is born. Next we see messiah ascend to heaven (Dan.7:13?),

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98 Some suggest these begin seven Signs spanning chs. 12–4. But besides the two uses here (vv1&3), the only other use is in 15:1. So there's not much evidence, and some counterevidence, for seven *Signs*.

99 She was either A# Ethnic Israel (including the Remnant), or B# the Jerusalemic church which fled Jerusalem before Titus attacked. If A#, her offspring was the church at large, if B#, her offspring would be the non-Jerusalemic church throughout the Empire.

100 As I once held, some think that v4 teaches that ⅓ of the angels fell with Satan. It seems a strange place to suddenly drop in a pre-Fall reference, and a rather oblique way to do so if felt to be an important addition. The pattern of third-ness reiterates the combined ideas of minority significance.

The Ten Horns/strengths (Dan.7:7,24) represent great power, and the Seven Heads, the kosmic permeation of that power, represent integration into fallen human society: likewise the Beast (Rv.13:1; 17:3).

and *Israel*—surely God's codename for his core plan—is now the messianic church,[101] which is targeted by the dragon. Like Ethnic Israel saved from Egypt, so Global Israel, freed from sin's slavery, begins its journey to the eternal Promised Land.[102]

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101 "It is impermissible to argue that 'Israel' cannot change its referent within the space of two verses… (Rm.9:6) began [a] whole section with…a programmatic distinction of two 'Israels'" (Wright 250).

102 From one perspective, Global Israel is now in the Promised Land. From another perspective, the Promised Land is still future. Like marriage, the church is messiah's wife but not yet his wedded wife. Each eucharist represents this exodus, Christ himself being the true passover lamb—the wine symbolising his lifeblood shed to spare us, and his unbroken body symbolising the hastily prepared bread symbolising the final urgency to leave Egypt.

Chapter 5

Man's Enemy

Rev.12:7–13:18

Section G: The Unholy Trinity: 12:7–13:18

The Sky Beast/The Dragon: 12:7-18[103]

Symbolic history 1: Enter the Dragon: 12:7-12

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Behold, the Dragon cast from heaven is the Snake of *Genesis*, prophesied to be crushed by the Woman's child (Gen.3:15).[104] Following Global Israel's birth, it's as if we see God's army—not a human one—engage and defeat the enemy who bears such evil names as Dragon-Snake, Devil-Slanderer, Satanic-Accuser (Rv.12:9). But he who does not belong in heaven, still has

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[103] The MEVV record the seashore setting as 12:18 (CEV/ERV/LEB/NABRE/NCV/NLT), or as 13:1 (CEB/NIV/NKJV/NRSV). The older RSV/ESV have v17.

[104] As a matter of interest, the term *Antichrist* isn't used in *Revelation*, and is perhaps unhelpful in systematic eschatology. Only John's letters used that term, perhaps as a stance manifested by real human beings who opposed/falsely represented, the christ. Some (said John) had spoken of an antichrist to come—presumably in a 'last hour'. Whatever his audience had heard, does the NT teach us about any particular person holding such an exclusive title?

Did John affirm or disaffirm that idea of a future individual antichrist leading a pack of antichrists? Should we translate his use of the term, *the antichrist*, to be in caution marks: ie 'the antichrist', 'the [so-called] antichrist'? Why—said John—there already were plenty of that sort of folk about, and it was even then this 'last hour' (1 Jhn.2:18). Indeed anyone denying the messiahship of Jesus, and God as his father, were of that ilk (1 Jhn.2:22). An antichristian spirit, the rejection of Jesus as having come from God as father, was already doing the rounds (1 Jhn.4:3), denying the incarnation (2 Jhn.1:7).

power on earth—a lesser venue.[105] He's unable to prevent Global Israel's inception, but able to damage its link to God by contaminating its relationships. Nevertheless, the good news, thanks to Israel's son, is that it's in place.

Yes God's reign, messiah's authority, has come, and Global Israel has authority over Satan. This assumes Christians to be under messianic authority—the chain of command—that requires a martyr complex,[106] as proactive witnesses as well as related preparedness to physical death for that witness. The Dragon is defeated, but with God's permission, he is making waves in a new direction (12). This last verse introduces a word similar to *orgē* (6:16 *et al*), namely *thumos*.

> In *Revelation*, *orgē* always relates to God, and *thumos* usually does. Translators tend to use the same word for English versions, usually *anger* (NCV) or *wrath* (NKJV/NRSV), for both Greek words, and if anything, treat *thumos* in some contexts as the hotter word (eg *fury* (NIV), *maddening* (NIV), *passionate* (NLT)).[107]

Symbolic history 2: Exit one Woman: 12:13-8

If the Dragon's target had been Christ, that's failed, and God's plans (with Ethnic Israel being the mother) have moved from the ethnic to the global. Remember when our community was ethnical Jewish, it was targeted by ethnic Jews acting like the Dragon. John's told us of the Sanhedrin's attempt to stop him growing the church (Ac.4), and of subsequent actions to persecute the New Woman (eg Ac.8).[108]

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105 Satan is a person, but to what extent his history is literally portrayed is moot. Suffice it here to note that the OT refers to an opponent (the satan) with special connection to Earth, and that *Revelation* pictures his 'wings' severely clipped: he had failed to abort God's new creation.

106 It does not mean that we should seek, or are necessarily under, oppressive persecution.

107 See Smalley 365-6.

108 *Woman*, is one picture for the church. Some ask whether John's Gospel is anti-Jewish (people). No, but the NT *is* unashamedly anti-Judaic (religion), since

Saul moved from hound to hare: he too became a target (eg Ac.23:12). But, with Nero, the target became the Woman's children, Gentile Christians. Maybe we are not always an active target, but we're always under a general cloud, and make useful scapegoats when things go wrong. And we never know what Roman region will suddenly start an anti-Christian pogrom—we can lose our business, be banned from public services, have to fight for life, or even be executed. All within the reminder that, well, 3½ 'times' in only half the time the Dragon would need for complete victory (Rv.12:14). Calm and storm, we'll make it through.[109]

The Sea Beast/The Beast: 13:1-10

Symbolic history 3: An Age of destruction: 13:1-10

The Dragon—a Sky Beast—summons a Sea Beast (13:1).[110] This looks like Daniel's Beast 4 (Dan.7) but with features from the other 3 Beasts. It's good to remember that Daniel's times were rather like our own—God's people being persecuted. Can you image if Nero, who having persecuted the church committed suicide, arose from the dead to Rome's surprise and delight (Rv.13:3). Such a hostile one towards the church would represent the World's opposition (13:8).

Maybe the wounded head (3,14) is some link to the Dragon, a war wound picked up when the woman's child damaged the snake's head (Gen.3:15)?[111] I've heard someone call that text the

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that religion exists to deny God's global covenant. Certainly with John's Gospel, the word-for-word translation of 'Jew' should be functionally translated according to context. MEVV Grades = A+ (NLT); A (CEV); B+ (CEB); B (NIV); C+ (ERV); C (NCV); D- (LEB/NABRE/NKJV/NRSV).

109 Either as 12:17/8 or 13:1, a short bit of text puts either John (NKJV: unlikely) or the Dragon (other MEVV: likely), on the seashore, before the Sea Beast arises.

110 Poythress 139-40 helpfully contrasts the Beast—as a false messiah—to Jesus the true messiah.

111 Influenced by then progressive New Eve (Mary) tendencies, the Old Latin reading of *ipsum* (it) changed to *ipsa* (she). Wycliffe translated the Vulgate as *sche schal breke thin heed*; the Douay as *she shal bruise thy head*. Today's Catholic versions (eg NABRE/NJB/NCB) correct that tendency error.

protoeuangelion. Sadly the 'world' often worships brute power. Though God's power is infinitely greater, he doesn't seek such flighty worshippers. For how can he bless through worship, those who worship him for impure reasons—is there love in brute power?

The State can offer false security: do we fear human opinion, death, pain, and poverty, so much that we will bow to government pressure? Will we each perish in our own inner Patmos? Whenever a state claims autonomy from God, it blasphemes. How often will we swallow the lie that mortals can be like deity, or even divinity? But God permits egocentric rebels to dominate the scene, Beasts whose authority ties in with distress and persecution (Rv.13:5; 11:2-3; 12:6,14). Let's be in the Beast's bad books, and in God's good book.[112] It is comforting to know that God, who authorised Pilate to execute Jesus, authorises the Beast to overcome the saints: there's a lot we must just put up with—it might not be just, but it is legal.[113]

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112 Rv.13:8 might speak of names written before history's start (see 17:8), rather than the Lamb slaughtered from its start. The LEB/NKJV simply present the idea of the Lamb slain at the start. The NIV/NLT prefer the idea of the Lamb slain at the start, but allow the option. The CEV/NRSV prefer the idea that the Lamb wasn't slain at the start, but allow the option.

The CEB/ERV/NABRE/NCV simply present the idea that the Lamb wasn't slain at the start. The NCV suggests that even from prehistory, some have refused to *worship* the Beast in his earlier manifestations. The MEVV thus cover the ideas that the Lamb's death has feedback into God's transcendence; that it potentially covers everyone from man's start; that God's fore-/trans-knowledge of the redeemed, implies his fore-/trans-knowledge of the Beast, as well as their security; that the battle between kingdoms goes back to man's origins.

113 MEVV options (13:10): those to be captured and killed will be captured and killed (CEB/CEV/ERV/NABRE/NCV/NIV/NLT); males to be captured and killed will be captured and killed (LEB); those to be captured will be captured; killers should/will be killed (NIVn/NRSV); the only male human being who captures shall be captured, and he who kills shall be killed (NKJV). The context of Jr.15:2 and 43:11 was of disloyal Ethnic Israel, but the loyal remnant shared the same fate and might have protested at that unfairness (Beale & Carson 1129).

The Earth Beast/The False Prophet: 13:11-8

Symbolic history 4: An Age of Deception: 13:11-8

Does the Sky-Beast look like a false father? Does the Sea-Beast look like a false christ? Does this Earth Beast/False Prophet (13:11; 17:13) look like a false spirt? What an unholy trinity of False-father, False-son, and False-spirit![114] This Beast might look a bit like a lamb, compared to the previous Beast, but it continues its satanic policies. Jesus did *sēmeia*, miracles-with-a-point. This Beast does things to show off and gain points. Elijah prayed fire down from heaven, to return a nation to God. This Beast effectively blinds folk away from God. Resistance is not futile, but it is dangerous.

It seeks to align the world with its own paradigm, its own *Genesis* of Sky, Sea, and Earth. Somehow it makes it clear who is for or against it.[115] But before I go on, in line with our brother John, instead of talking about the Sky Beast, let's just call it the Dragon. And instead of talking about the Sea Beast, let's just call it the Beast. And instead of talking about the Land Beast, let's just call it the False Prophet.

> Ideas of the Earth Beast's *mark* (13:18) have included people, like Nero, Domitian, Napoleon, Hitler, and Tony Blair. C2 Irenaeus noted that *Lateinos* (Latin Man) in Greek letters has the numerical values of 30, 1, 300, 5, 10, 50, 70, 200 = 666. Some have applied this to the Roman Empire. Later, some applied it to the Holy Roman

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114 Poythress 16-22; 139-41, enlarges on the theme of counterfeiting. The Enemy presents as God to our disadvantage, not to our advantage.

115 In our commercial age, legislation without Christian consent can encircle the world. Legislation can carry economic and personal freedom penalties. In the West, police forces seem itching to repress Christianity—perhaps less forcefully than subduing theists in general—which doesn't buy into (ie wear the mark of) its wokeism. Perhaps people won't be microchipped, though they could go the way of pets. There have always been Big Brother methods to sideline the godly. Roman legislation said, *Practice worship libations to the 'divine-spirit' of Caesar, and we'll give you a certificate of good citizenship*. Lacking such a passport—unless you had a limited religious exemption—you risked life and liberty as undermining Rome by offending its deities. Hail Themis.

Empire of Charlemagne, crowned by the Pope of the Latin/Roman 'Church'.

But perhaps its point was more general. A bit like this: 1# the numbers 7 & 3 tend to signify fullness in *Revelation* (eg the seven spirits or seven-fold spirit, seven Trumpets, etc; the 3 gates on each side of the city—21:13)—indeed, a thrice written word, from the Sinai perspective, emphasised the utmost. For example, 'holy, holy, holy' (Is.6:3) meant 'most most holy'. 2# if deific perfection is thus 777, the number 666 ('6' often signified man's number) symbolises that man falls short on every point.[116] Even before Nero, from time to time and in place to place, Christians have had either to submit to anti-Christian commands or to die (13:17). Perhaps our age will end on this note.

Poythress was not the first to raise this important warning flag. "In our modern society, the mass media, educational institutions, advertising, and the whole 'knowledge industry' offer the principal channels through which people learn and confirm their views of themselves and their world. In principle, technologically enhanced communication and social organizations can support either truth or error, righteousness or wickedness. But in societies affected by the Fall, all too often distortions of the truth invite people to pursue idols and simultaneously blind themselves to the realities of their idolatry.

"For example, the media may become filled with presuppositions of a materialistic worldview. In the resulting message, God need not be mentioned except in expletives, since he is [deemed] nonexistent, absent, or irrelevant…. [It says that] we are part of an evolutionary whole.[117] [And that] progress comes by freeing ourselves from a primitive past. [And that] money, health, intelligence, beauty, and sexual pleasure, give us the good life.…

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116 Beware fixation with the number's meaning: it is too easy to play games with it to get the answer we wish. Some, if the proper name by itself will not yield 666 (or textual variant, 616), will add a title. And, if not finding the sum in Greek, will try Hebrew, or even Latin, without being fussy about the spelling.

117 I do not deny biological evolution—for which see Perry Marshall's *Evolution 2.0*—but I deny the idea that the universe and life are simply self-caused, and are the whole show: see C S Lewis' *Miracles*.

"These ideas pervade the atmosphere. They are all the more insidious because they are 'atmospheric'. They tend to be assumed rather than argued. One receives the subtle impression that it is all obvious. Everyone who is informed, everyone who is 'with it', has gone past the stage of questioning. In reality, though, there never was a fundamental questioning, because the idea seemed so natural and inevitable. The average person is no more aware of them than fish are aware of the water in which they have swum from birth. The few who are aware can take comfort. They say to themselves, 'how could we possibly be wrong, when the miracles of modern science and technology show the superiority of our idea over those of the past?'" (Poythress 144).

Chapter 6

Still the Winners

Rev.14:1-20

Section F': The Redeemed Still Stand: 14:1-20

Symbolic history 5: God's army: 14:1-5

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. But let us bid good riddance to these Beasts. For now before our sight we can gaze out over the Yeshuic Kingdom, from our time and extending throughout whatever history there is to come (14:1).[118] When John spoke of 144,000, he did not mean it is small, or that this amount is only a part of it. We emphasise its military muscle in fighting, not against human beings, but spiritually against the Dragon and his fellow Beasts, against the evil that really sucks man down. Yeshua's Army is composed of young and old, from all ethnicities, but who together are typologically like the army of Ethnic Israel long ago. Even as they practiced cultus celibacy in wartime, so Yeshua's army ideally puts his will before civilian delights and duties.[119]

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118 Some, deeming 'firstfruits' (4b) to mean *partial harvest*, deem it limited to the witnesses executed for their witness. But as Douglas J Moo pointed out on Jas.1:18, "…*first fruits* (*aparchē*) is a customary NT designation of Christians (see especially 2 Ths.2:13; Rv.14:4). And the idea of Christians as the *first fruits* of a redeemed creation in paralleled in Rm.8:19-23" (76).

119 I heard that a conference speaker went to the toilet with his tie-clip mic still switched on, and that the audience then heard the sound of "rushing water"—but fortunately no "loud thunder" (CEB: 2)! John's point was rather about a musical choir in full throttle: perhaps prophetic song. God rocks! God and the Lamb were pictured as enthroned, and the Spirit as intermingled with us, as in John's Gospel, where the son and father are pictured in heaven, and the spirit as representing Jesus among us on earth.

As said from ch.7: guys/girls, married/unmarried, were imaged as Yahweh's human army in wartime had been, that is as men, almost all husband-fathers, ensuring their battle-readiness. Recognising the gender-inclusiveness for the 144,000, all MEVV avoid the term 'men' except the gender-outdated NKJV.

In mentioning women—without specifying a type, rather than the one prostitute (17:1,15)—I doubt that there's any allusion to avoiding spiritual fornication with evil, though avoidance would still befit this army dedicated to God. Nor do I think any priesthood within the church, whether celibate (Roman) or married (Orthodox), was implied: alas the sexual temptation on celibate 'priests' to abuse the vulnerable in their care—we might pity them as victims. Nor should the idea of celibacy as a *gift from God*, be invoked. Paul wished all Christians, celibate and married, to control their sexuality, and taught God's gift of help both within marriage and within celibacy: he himself probably desired to marry. Incidentally, though its symbolism is invoked, the Sinaitic Covenant's cultus laws are no longer valid.

Morris nicely noted: "the world of the day does not seem to have been exactly overburdened with people who had a strict regard for truth, and Christians must have stood out" (Morris 172).

Symbolic history 6: God's angels: 14:6-13

In turn, we've just heard pronouncements from three angels: God is to be worshipped; Babylon has fallen;[120] and those who oppose God will face his anger. Angel 1 doesn't say worship *only* God: the context is in contrast to worshipping the Beast. And there's mention of fearing God, for in contrast to the repressive fear which the Beast inspires (φοβος/*phobos*), God inspires reverence.[121] God doesn't come from Sky/Sea/Earth: they come from him, who

[120] As the vision was developed, the name *Babylon* expanded to show why in its then current form of Rome, John had been exiled (cut off from its life) for not being squeezed into its immoral pattern of thinking.

[121] Same word, but a change in meaning might be implied. Some suggest it's a warning to Beast worshippers.

sources our drinking supplies as well.[122] In contrast, the Beast encourages the wine of adultery (8).[123] Such winebibbers will end up with the unappetising wine of God's anger, when forced to face the Lamb (10). Alas we see no relief for them.[124]

> On the other hand, we're to keep on trucking. Fidelity to God is the *enviable* (μακαριος/*makarios*) path—though the MEVV (except CEB) say *blessed*, which might seem to suggest that God *adds* blessing (14:13). They link 'from now on', with [enviable] death—that is, death *from now on*. The strange saying about the *nekroi* (dead/died who die) may contrast along NT lines: unlike all who live without rest in the Beast (11), all who die as Christians (*from now on*, being the Yeshuic Age) are enviable (maybe even to OT saints in the bliss of heaven). The contrast pictures a typical Christian privileged to have spent obedient time on earth with the lord Yeshua (even if they were persecuted), a satisfaction to look back on. It is better to die in godly peace—and then enjoy the fuller rest—than live in ungodly restlessness.

Symbolic history 7: God's anger: 14:14-20

Then a harvest begins at angelic command. John saw someone like a *son of man*. As we know, the cloud-seat hints at deity. And since John did identify the person "like a son of man" (*homoion huiō(i) anthrōpou*) in 1:13, as Jesus, did he not imply that the person "like a

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122 Yet can impose discipline in each area (8:7-12; 16:1-9). Of note, springs of water connect sky, land, and sea (evaporation/precipitation); gas/solid/liquid.

123 Using *Babylon* as a code in John's days for Rome, was safer than bluntly prophesying Rome's fall! It would also have had a global and more enduring meaning, for the rebellious human network that has sought autonomy.

124 Does John's symbolism give definitive teaching about fallen man's ultimate self-chosen fate? It is certainly likely that those who really have attuned to sin shall depart from real good. And that Christ's return means "a separation between good and evil within people. Within evil people, evil will come to full fruition" (Poythress 151). Indeed mere noxious fumes of sulphur (θειον/*theion*: see Gen.19:24; Rv.19:20; 20:10; 21:8) hardly do this justice. Does God's *anger*—the passionate word θυμος/*thumos*, not the steadier anger (οργη/*orgē*)—in effect mean *total abandonment*?

son of man" (*homoion huiō(i) anthrōpou*) in 14:14, was likewise Jesus?[125] We are reminded of the son of man theme, but does Jesus command all angels, or do angels command him? And are then the *other* angels (temple commands cloud; altar commands temple: v15 to v14; v18 to v17), equals?

> Did God the father used an intermediary angel to inform Jesus of his will? It can help to recall that in the OT, Yahweh's Angel sometimes seemed to be Yahweh (some say he was God the son). Could it be that in *Revelation*, Jesus' Angel sometimes seemed to be Jesus? An isn't-but-is-a-bit-like? Did John see an angel carrying tokens of Jesus' authority, reminding us that our lord in involved in current actions? To say that the sharp sickle was a token of the judgment left with Jesus (Jhn.5:27), doesn't account for the 'other' angel with another sharp sickle (Rv.14:17): had 'both' angels/messengers (?) the *same* right to judge?
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> "It is more likely that the 'humanlike one' is a heavenly figure sharing something of the glory of Christ, like the 'mighty angel' of 10:1" (Carson 1997:1444). Morris 179 implied that numeric symbolism prefers 7 angels, to 6 angels plus *the* son of man, and apocalyptic often put angels as humans, and humans as animals. We should reckon that v14 is of a pivotal angel, whose central position (three angels before; three angels after) was wrapped in messianic tokens to indicate Christ's coordination of all seven angels. If this reads aright, then Angel 5 instructs Angel 4, just as Angel 7 instructs Angel 6: teamwork within the angelic network.

But whether as a messenger alongside angels, or as their boss, is Jesus messiah into demolition? Is inflicting suffering ever right, especially if underserved? Unhappy with the existence of pain,

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[125] Not according to John Wesley. Granted, the tags here are so messianic that some think that the overall picture is of six angels (6,8,9,15,17,18) working with, even conveying orders to, Jesus. But was he an equal who couldn't hear his father directly?

Yet "son of man" lacks the definite article, the 'the'. Grammarians debate whether it warrants a simple 'a' or a definite 'the': a son of man, or the son of man. In context, I think that "like a son of man" is closer to a Jesus-identification, or at least an emphasis on his ongoing mission via angels.

some people say that there can't be a good almighty god, since humanity suffers but a good almighty god would wish to and would be able to prevent this. Do these folk simply seek God's deniability? After all, the ideas that God exists and that we are accountable to him, is disturbing news.

Let us consider. The creator permits human free will, thus permitting our unfaithfulness and therefore our faithfulness to exist. And is not the creator[126] justified to withdraw anyone at any time from the mortal stage to the immortal stage, though usually leaving death to natural circumstances? As fellow players on the stage, our authority to order others off is limited, not absolute (Gen.9:6). God is semi-interventional and all-wise. And destruction can be a necessary job, like demolishing a condemned house in order to make way for a new house. Let us recall that Yahweh (Jl.3:13) also linked harvesting and grape-pressing as parallel images of punishment. Did he not say that the wicked peoples would be cut down like grain at harvest time, crushed as grapes are crushed in a full wine press until the wine runs over?

As removing a spiritual cancer, right-minded human beings call for this judgment—and it might be a double whammy. However, some suggest that the grain harvest gathers the saints to glory, and that the grape harvest gathers the sinners to the abyss of their choice: separation to God for some, can through adverse judgement upon the others, be separation from God. We see that after the time of patience ends (Rv.6:10-1), an epoch-ending slaughter begins. While symbolic, not literal, it still shows the enormity of evil to be overthrown—a river of blood 1,600 stadia long![127]

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126 God is creator of the biosphere as Ultimate Source, not by Individual Creation.

127 Literally this would be about 300 Km. Yet conversions to alternative measuring systems lose symbolism. Had kilometres been the measurement in John's days, he might happily have said 1,600 Km, since he spoke of the sum, not its answer. He might have meant 4x4 ("the square of four, the number of the earth which is the abode of the wicked" multiplied by 100, "the square of

ten, the number of completeness" (Morris 181). Allowing Greek *stadia* to be near enough to English *furlongs*, and allowing MEVV to adjust current measurements to the nearest 100, I prefer versions which use the 1,600 figure in their text, and footnote an idea of distance in our terms: thus, the LEB/NIV, then the NKJV, then the CEB/ERV/NABRE/NLT/NRSV, then the CEV/NCV.

Chapter 7

Still the Losers

Rev.15:1–20:10

Section E': Angels Still in Action—nature focus: 15–19:10

Humanity is Still Sinful:15:1–16:21

Preliminaries

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Firstly, John saw[128] seven angels getting ready to plague the earth—the impending storm. Let's not liken God's *orgē* (*anger*: CEB/CEV/ERV/NCV; *fury*: NABRE; *wrath*: LEB/NIV/NKJV/NLT/NRSV) to human anger. If sin really damages humanity, then rejection of sin benefits humanity: God curses sin since sin curses us; our enemy is God's enemy. Divine anger is not an emotional response, but God's heartfelt and logical rejection of all sin and all who adhere to it. When possible, it is always linked to an offer at his expense to freedom from enslavery to sin. Rebels may surrender but otherwise will be fought, and in the fight may better see and accept the grace offered of forgiveness. But defeat must be total, one way or another.[129] John sees storm clouds of wrath looming large.

As he looks, does he see these things within a framework of a new exodus? Does the crystal sea not reflect somewhat the Yam Suph (Reed/Red Sea) of exodus, even if it goes beyond? Are the general

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128 The Greek apocalyptic marker, *I saw* (*kai eidon*: 1,2,5) is constant. Wycliffe so translated it, but Tyndale introduced a stylistic change to 'lo[o]ked' in v5. Of the MEVV, only the ERV and NCV are consistent.

129 See John Stott's *The Cross of Christ*, 2004:102-10. A dim analogy is that the war against Germany's Nazism, saved the German people. Likewise, killing bad viruses can save patients.

setting of Plagues—although pictured as seven instead of ten—as well as seeing God's battle *orgē* (Ex.15:7), hearing echoes of the song of the Sea, and seeing the warrior Lamb, to underline a new exodus idea? Surely deliverance from False Egypt to True Canaan, awaits us. Does the NT not show that Yeshua is the True Moses, and that his exodus was the True Exodus to the True Promised Land, in which we share and shall see fulfilled? Fearing God is humbly and worshipfully welcoming his commendations and condemnations. After overcoming the Beast, earth shall see God's justice.

Then the storm hits. It came from the temple (*naos*), *that is,* the tent of witness,[130] which was in heaven. Surely the true exodus is a spiritual thing, so therefore the true contents of the true tent, relating to covenant and priesthood, are the true. Stephen had once made a similar point: Ethnic Israel had had a *skēnē tou maturiou* (Ac.7:44)—a tent of witness—but God's true presence transcends the material world, and he doesn't live in temples (*naos*: 48).

John also sees the *tessarōn zōōn*, the four living creatures, the kerubim representing God to the four points of the earth (Ezk.10:20). Yes, he sees that the highest angels are also focused on God's plans for our favoured planet. I wonder whether the two mentions of Golden Bowls (here (judgment) and in 5:8 (prayer)), imply a link between prayer and judgement (God's judicial intervention). Surely angels act as agents of God's discrimination—and what a blessing is good discrimination—willingly doing God's will.[131] God's wrath is linked to his awesomeness. As we know, we can trace in OT times the theme of unapproachableness (eg Nb.14:10; 1 Kg.8:11; Ezk.11:23). Here, it indicates not that heaven's gates are temporarily

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130 The appositional genitive indicates a synonym, a *that is*.

Skēnē (5) may be put as *tabernacle* (NIV/NKJV/NLT), *tent* (CEB/CEV/LEB/NABRE/NCV/NRSV), or *holy place* (ERV). It was, so to speak, the exodus stage of the temple.

Martyriou may be put as *witness*, or *testimony*, just possibly *martyrdom*, but not (*pace* NCV) *agreement*. The Greek text is reflected in such as Nb.10:11.

131 See Smalley 392.

barred to sinners and saints, but that we should be aware of the strong contrast between the normal human scene and a revelation of God's presence, which under Sinai had been so overwhelming.

In short, John's first sight was of bad times for 'Egypt', his second was of a gleam of light for God's Israel, of deliverance to true land, then his third sight reverts to the majestic storm from heaven itself.

Let them drink wrath: 16:1-21

And oh what a bucketload of storm he saw. Once more a series of 7 (heptad) began, this time of Bowls of Plagues.[132] I have heard that some ask whether the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls, form a stream of 21 judgments, or whether the final Seal covers the seven Trumpets, of which the last is the seven Bowls. But either way, I guess they ask whether God works through judgments in an historical sequence, an alpha to an omega. I have heard that some ask whether each set of seven presents the same dramatic cycle is varying ways. My voice is by no means the only voice, yet I shall speak.

Let us briefly contrast the Bowls to the Trumpets. In the Trumpets, one hears a voice of limited judgment, inviting repentance. That is what some people need to here. The Trumpets have a more limited impact of the earth, whereas the Bowls are comprehensive. The Trumpets allow for repentance, whereas the Bowls are a storm without shelter. The Trumpets indirectly harm people, whereas the Bowls directly harm people. In short, *Revelation* turns up the volume for those who are deaf to God's mercy. Now let us briefly compare the **T**rumpets to the **B**owls, from Trumpet one and Bowl one, to T7 & B7, combining them as we go. TB1 affects the land and its rebels; TB2 turns the sea to blood and kills aquatic life; TB3 turns rivers to blood; TB4 hits the sun; TB5 stirs up the demonic, and stir-

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132 *Phialai* were often two-handled, wide shallow dishes, used for religious libations, some made of almost pure 24-carat gold. The word Vial came from the Latin (*fialas*/*phialas*): see Wycliffe's *viols*. *Cup* might be a better way of translating *phialē* (so Beasley-Murray) than *bowl*, but *cup* could confuse with translating *potērion* as cup (14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6). I have kept *Bowl*, though *Sacred Cup* might be good.

crazy people blame God; TB6 hits Babylon's Euphrates River, opening the way for battle; TB7 raises voices of anguish.

Although these plagues are put as a positive input, we might consider that *Romans* puts the perspective that God can allow plagues which are self-fulfilling results of a sin of rebellion which leads into sins of deficiency (Rm.1:28).[133] We fairly reap what we sow, and sometimes unfairly reap what others have sown. The loud voice, *megalē phonē* (1), from which we get the word megaphone, stresses something not to be missed.

In obedience, an angel discriminates between spiritual Israel and spiritual Egypt, even as in ethnic days the *helkē* (sores) afflicted only the Egyptians (Ex.9:10). It may well be a psychological affliction, here and elsewhere, consequent to rejecting covenant with God—Christianity. That would result in a degradation of society at large.

A second Bowl (B2) carries God's curse to the seas, and B3 brings this home to us, reminding us that the River Nile turned to blood. John plays with the word *haima* (blood), blood-for-blood (6). For they who unjustly killed, shall be justly killed, in a setting of deadly water which divides the peoples. Even as the deceptive opponents of land, sea, and sky—Beasts—have been pictured as reversing Gen.1:28, so the attacks/blows numbered B1-4, cover earth, water, and sky. The sky is scorched, but here the sufferers reinforce their rebellion: how often do we blame God when it's our own silly fault?

> Greta Hort (1957) suggested that the 10 Plagues of Egypt,[134] were based around natural sequences of excessive flooding of the R. Nile and lasting about twelve months.[135] Some reject her suggestions, saying that these ideas deny the miraculous. But supernaturalists can happily affirm that Yahweh can plan around, even expedite,

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133 Likewise devastating venereal diseases can be picked up by sexual promiscuity.

134 Using *plague* in a somewhat outdated sense of *calamity*.

135 Even if her details are modified, her basic approach can be accepted. But T Desmond Alexander, argued that "attempts to align the supernatural events recorded in 7:8—14:51 with naturally occurring seasonal phenomena are clearly unsatisfactory" (155). I dissent from Alexander.

natural phenomena (1 Kg.22:34). Some reject her suggestions because there are indeed weaknesses in them. I am not aware of any schema that is watertight, but her basic hunch of a dramatic natural cascade of cause and effect, might be along the right lines, at least for the first nine *plagues/attacks*.

In principle, I can accept Yahweh having triggered such a cascade of events. When we talk of water turned to blood, we talk of the colour of dying (Lv.17:11), not necessarily blood red, but necessarily blood dead—water contaminated and deadly: the parallel account speaks of its bitter flavour, rather than its colour (Rv.8:11). The ancient world depended on its clean rivers. So we're reminded that it's not simply those around the coast who will witness the *plague*—rivers in general are mentioned (16:4).[136]

With B4, the sun of blessing becomes the sun of cursing, and God's name is cursed (8). Elsewhere *Revelation* only uses the actual term βλασφημω/*blasphēmō*, of the Beast. His followers are shadow copies of him, and by and large refuse to repent (*metanoō*)—to change their hearts and minds in relationship to God.[137]

Arguably the people of Egypt in *Exodus* days, had had the same hardness towards God's people as their pharaoh had had. God's

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136 Theodore Beza, John Calvin's successor, besides modifying the Stephanus 1550 Greek NT text, at times used 'conjectural emendations' (as if to say that it's got to be something like this though we haven't got a manuscript to prove it). That's a bit hit and miss. One such piece of educated guesswork, was replacing the correct *hosios* (pure), with *esomenos* (shall be), in Rv.16:5's "is…was…shall be". Following Beza against the Vulgate and Wycliffe, the KJV wrongly erred, putting *shall be*. "And I heard the Angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus" (KJV1611). John Wesley (and the NIV) reverted to the MT, and the Vulgate/ Wycliffe–Bishops: "And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous art thou, who art, and who wast, the Gracious one, because thou hast judged thus". Also note that the KJV *lord* had crept into later Latin editions, passing thus through Wycliffe into English, and was rightly removed by Wesley. Wesley's *gracious* could be put as *pure/holy*.

137 Are exceptions always stated? Should we allow that they can exist if unstated (eg Jhn.1:11-2), or assume that they don't exist unless stated?

name (*onoma*: Ex.5:2) represents his essential nature, so blaspheming that name indicates a deep-seated rebellion against him. Interestingly *Exodus* was a definition of his core identity to his people, a Yahweh identity. He was once defined in polytheistic contrast as the heavenly one, the god of heaven in contrast to the god of earth.[138]

Anyway, this takes us all the way back to the River Euphrates, which flowed through Ancient Babylon which, rather than Egypt, is the poetical enemy base in *Revelation* (12). Babylonia had been a superpower that, unlike Egypt, had captured God's people, howbeit in God's will. Now as New Babylon conspires against God's people, we may wonder whether our sins—and the need for purgation—have led to hostilities against us.

The Euphrates, a non-perennial and unpredictable river, when dry allows invasion forces in. Who are these kings? It may well be that they are symbolic of enemy power from whatever direction, the Euphrates in the east being chosen to keep the focus of the ancient eastern threat of Babylonia. The mention of east (from which God's

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138 *Contra* the *Worldwide English New Testament* (WENT). But lest we picture the blasphemers as being in heaven ("They cursed God in heaven"), I'd suggest expanding to, "They cursed God [who is] in heaven" (11). I still prefer it to the NIV's: "and cursed the god of heaven". The NT shows better understanding, but most MEVV translate in terms of a particular god (the god of), of a possessive god (eg my/your/their god), or of a type of god (eg almighty god).

We can certainly say that beyond *Revelation*'s contrast to Caesar (government) or even Satan as Rome's—the world's—*god*, it is preferable to dismiss god-type talk, in line with monotheism. For in reality as George Tyrrell said, "we do not even believe in a god, for this would imply a possible or conceivable multiplication of gods: but only in God" (76), but "God is Love—*Deus est Caritas*—and love is a relation between persons" (https://archive.org/details/lexorandiootyrruoft/page/104/mode/1up?view=theater). God is the one uncreated and eternal society, the Brute Fact.

For *Revelation*, of the MEVV, the CEV leads for monotheism. On polytheism, it sadly converges with the WENT on 3:12; 4:11; 7:2,10,12; 11:13; 16:11; 19:1,5; 21:7, sadly diverges on 3:12; 4:11; 7:2,10,12; 11:13; 16:11; 19:1,5; 21:7, and takes second place to the WENT overall.

angel came: 7:2) may also remind us that God is sovereign even over our enemies—they can be sent as his agents (Jl.2:11).[139]

We then move back to God's sinful agents for the final battle, three demonic spirits, indeed three forces from the Three Beasts, the Dragon (Sky Beast: 12:9), the [Sea] Beast (13:1-8), and the False Prophet (Earth Beast: 13:11)—an Unholy Trinity.[140] They are like frogs, reminding us of the plagues against Egypt. There is a disturbing thought that the False Prophet is characteristic of the Church[141] in the sense of undermining Christ's lordship from within the visible church. Already heresies, contamination of healthy teaching, has been at work, false signposts posted to mislead us.

> Nowadays, "the undermining of the old orthodoxy has been mainly the work of divines engaged in New Testament criticism. The authority of experts in that discipline is the authority in deference to whom we are asked to give up a huge mass of beliefs shared in common by the early Church, the Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformers, and even the C19.… Whatever these [experts] may be as Biblical critics, I distrust them as critics." They claim "to see fern-seed [but are unable to] see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight" (Lewis 1981:193,197). I think of how, for instance, Steve Chalke, following such critics into distrusting the Bible, has sought to select positives to keep and negatives to ditch, to adopt a culture of minimal resistance and maximum popularity.
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> In short, the undermining was done by fools (False Prophet), perhaps knaves, regardless of how well they sold their story to avid readers. Lewis added that if they truly represented the Anglican voice, then Anglicanism was Atheism's voice from which Rome offered better protection. How often has the false church spoken? The Earth Beast has encouraged Christians to move from

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139 G R Beasley-Murray linked them to the kings of 17:12-3, which he identified with Roman 'kings', one of whom had been Nero (Carson 1997:1446-7). This would equate the 'kings' of the literal West, with kings of a symbolical East. It might be better to envisage two sets of 'kings'.

140 Beast 1 is the Dragon, Beast 2 is the Beast, and Beast 3 is the False Prophet.

141 See Smalley 409.

Christianity and, doubting its canonical message, to proclaim their own message in its name.

Yet John proclaimed that God aimed to sort things out for once and for all. Jesus then spoke of his return to meet his enemies in battle (15). Anticipating WW1, Sherlock Holmes predicted "…an east wind…such…as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared" (Doyle 808). Rather optimistic, it was based on the idea that a good fair fight can clear the air, though history records a weaker England and weaker Commonwealth after WW1, and festering resentment in Germany.

Revelation predicts a much more predictable outcome, and much cleaner air. The lord of the church intervened with a word of caution about this battle: his people shouldn't be like soldiers sleeping during an enemy attack, but should be spiritually dressed as his people. Our battle dress identifies our side. Background images include Rv.3:3,18. This leads to the battle of Armageddon. The Hebrew to Greek *Armageddōn*[142] is probably an apocalyptic construct connecting various ideas, and about an event rather than a place, the idea of a global mountain of worldly rebellion brought to its final defeat.[143] This picture of rebellious armies united for

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142 There never was a Mount ('har') Megiddo, though there was a Mound Megiddo, a low hill in the plains in which the town of Megiddo was built. The city itself has biblical mention (eg Jg.1:27), and some battles were in the plain in which Megiddo was built, but it seems to have been a relatively minor character in OT battles. That John spoke of the final battle being at 'Jerusalem' (Rv.14:20; 20:8-9) as distinct from Megiddo—even if this Jerusalem is synecdoche for the global people of God—seems to prefer the idea that Megiddo was code for a broad idea. A round of post-apocalyptic films are based on a sense of human weakness—not sinful as such—and tend to picture humanity as knocked down but not knocked out.

143 Such ideas could include "the defeat of kings who oppress God's people (Jg.5:19-21); the destruction of false prophets (1 Kg.18:40); the death of misled kings, which led to mourning (2 Kg.23:29; 2 Chr.35:20-5); and the future expectation that in direct connection with the one 'whom they have pierced',

> battle against God, waiting to be destroyed, is followed by a picture of a static location of rebellion, Babylon, to be destroyed by heaven (storms) and earth (earthquake undermining foundations). Thus, John moved from the rebellious attack (Armageddon), to the rebellious defence (Babylon): both offensive and defensive shall be taken down.

Babylon is the hub of rebellion. John of course meant Rome as the heart of the Roman Empire, but it will go ill with us if Caesar realises that! Yet we should not doubt that John would have excluded other worldly empires whether past, present, or future. Should we exclude all but Rome, empires such as the Han Empire at the far end of the Silk Road, and the Kushan Empire at the centre of the Silk Road, of which I have heard tell? Nay, Babylon stands for human dominance and self-will, wherever displayed.

Yet as the hydra sea monster has many heads, so all these form but one global alliance against God. Its heads shall be severed; its body shall be slain; its power shall be shattered. Hailstones, it is said, are caused by rainclouds being lifted by updrafts into higher and colder regions, until Earth pulls them from the updraft and they fall.[144] We see an impossible storm pulverising an impossible city. Elsewhere, John linked earthquakes to the sixth Seal causing kosmic fear (6:12-6). In response to prayer (8:4), the ascension of the two witnesses (11:13), and God's effective reign (11:19), at last the end has finally come—the perfect tense of *ginomai* (*gegonen*).[145]

Remember the hailstorm of *Exodus*? As impossible as it physically is for such quakes and hails, so it seems spiritually impossible to

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there would be destruction of 'all the nations that come against Jerusalem' and a mourning by all Israel's tribes (Zc.12:9-12)" (Beale & Carson 1136-7).

144 20 m.p.h. updrafts can cause small hailstones; 100 m.p.h. updrafts can cause hailstones between about 10-20 cm, as smaller ice crystals drop a bit, melt a bit, then rise up and marry up. The largest recorded hailstone was almost 1 Kg, but in John's storm theophany (Ex.19:16-8), he prophesied weights of around 40 Kg, one *talanton*—some updraft!

145 Rv.16:17: The Greek perfect tense is a present state resulting from past action. Here, God's justice will have been brought into ongoing clarity by the just war.

finally overthrow the Babylon that existed well before the Akkadian Empire, and might exist well after the Roman, not to mention the Babylon within us.[146] The split into three parts may reflect the seismic breaking up of the Three Beasts. And now behold, the rebellious largely blame God for their woes, though doubtless some repent of their rebellion that sparked his response.[147]

Yes the False Church Falls: 17–8

Did our brother link the terms 'mystery' and 'Babylon' as if a compound name? That is, should we talk of Mysterious Babylon, or of some mystery about Babylon? Rv.17:18 might suggest the latter, that the mystery—the insider knowledge—was that she, Babylon, would have global sovereignty over human sovereignties.[148] Did John merely play a name-that-city game? Whatever Babylon represents, which human city best captures John's meaning now?

> Was it perhaps Jerusalem, as Peter Leithart suggested? Ethno-Zionism must object, but let it be admitted that old/earthly Jerusalem lacked good press in John's context, and of his three mentions, two speak of a new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2), and the third has that new Jerusalem coming down from heaven (21:10).
>
> In Leithart's favour is the fact that the new covenant throws a lot of negative mud at old/earthly Jerusalem. The God-given can

146 "Our modern cities, with their wealth, false religions, and sexual exploitation, are modern forms of Babylon" (Poythress 161).

147 In linking hail to the exodus, whereas it was simply the seventh plague out of ten, Richard Bauckham suggested that John linked the exodian hail (Ex.9—seventh was a symbolical number) with the climatic *Exodus* theophany of Ex.19:18 and the hail of Jos.10:11. Perhaps John pictured "the total history of the Exodus, from the plagues of Egypt to the Conquest of Canaan, as one great manifestation of God's redemptive power to judge the nations and deliverer his people" (Smalley 416).

148 The compound name, Mystery Babylon, is rare in the history of the English Bible. The nearest MEVV is the NKJV, carrying on the Wycliffe/KJV use of Mystery as an exclamation. Neither *Revelation*'s other five mentions of Babylon (14:8; 16:19; 18:2,10,21), nor its other three mentions of mystery (1:20; 10:7; 17:7), combine.

become corrupt (2 Kg.18:4); the Jerusalem of Sinai became the Hagar of Slavery (Gal.4:21-31). Seasons of blessing can end. Matthew spoke of fulfilments. Paul contrasted physical circumcision to spiritual circumcision, and Spiritual Israel to Ethnic Israel. John's Gospel spoke of the *true*, not as contrasting to a previous falsity, but as contrasting to a previous shadow, somewhat as a seed below to the plant above.[149] *Revelation* speaks of some ethnic Jews—the apostle John was an ethnic Jew—as believing ethnically, that they were still among God's chosen people (eg 2:9). In principle, an enmity between the earthly/ethno-Jerusalem and the heavenly/spirito-Jerusalem, is a biblical given. Moreover, Rv.18:24 speaks of prophets' blood. Wasn't generally ethno-Jerusalem the only place the biblical prophets (including Jesus as a prophet) died (Lk.13:33; Rv.11:8)?

Yet we should avoid wooden arguments. For instance, it should be noted that some biblical prophets died outside of the Land of Judah (eg Moses, Samuel, probably Jeremiah, and probably Israelite prophets when Judah was off-limits), and that Jesus was killed outside of Jerusalem. "I feel fine" might mean literally that—though my body language might suggest that I'm feeling miserable. But saying that "I'm head over heels in love", obviously gives meaning other than the merely wooden words of a gymnast. Words carry meaning; context modifies meaning.

Is it therefore not a case of going beyond Jesus' *words* to Jesus' *meaning*, since obviously if meant literally they wouldn't have made sense in his earthly days (Lk.13:33). Reading within his context, we can admit that there was a general appropriateness for prophets of Yahweh to die (by whatever cause) in the then holy city, or at least in its immediate confines. Hence his journey to Jerusalem was as a prophet doomed to die. But most/all Gentile *prophets* died elsewhere, and Rv.18:24 seems to me to globalise John's verse—"of all who have been slaughtered on the earth" (NIV). We need not get tied up in seeking one specific locality as the only place where God's prophets have died. Incidentally απολλυμεθα/*apollumetha* (Lk.13:33) may simply mean 'die/perish', as in Mt.8:25; 9:17, though killing is spoken about in the very next sentence. Scripture makes it clear that both Jerusalem and Rome

149 Continuity is in ethnic Jews who have turned to messiah (Jhn.1:12).

> acted as one in Jesus' execution, and John might have seen Jerusalem as an adjunct of Rome.
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> I think the negative press of earthly Jerusalem, was not to suggest that it was far worse than the Gentile world, but merely to suggest that it was part of the evil world. What was once the special people, once upgraded from the κοσμος/*kosmos*,[150] had returned to the common fold after birthing the Lamb and the new flock. *Babylon* thus functions as the common fold, I think, in contrast to spiritual Jerusalem.
>
> It is perhaps easier for us to hold the Babylon = Jerusalem idea, than for John and the Primitive Church to have held that idea. For them, Rome, not Jerusalem, was top gun.

I repeat. *Babylon* figured as code for Rome, with *Rome* being code for the anti-messianic kosmos—a theme, not a city. Perhaps the picture of a prostitute contrasts God's Wisdom (Christ) to the infamous Dame Folly (anti-Christ) of Pr.9. In contrast, *Revelation* pictures the church as messiah's chaste bride (19:7),[151] whereas Ethnic Israel has a past of spiritual prostitution (Is.1:21; Rv.11:8). Indeed, the lament was all too common because it was God's chosen yet disloyal people, described also as his wife—so its infidelity was pictured as a spousal betrayal. However, it seems unfair to specify that exclusive people with John's image of Babylon. With humanity's fall, the race has always had a hint of spiritual prostitution, and no one people (or city) would have such power to corrupt that John's context implies. Israel's Jerusalem was more captured by the kings of the world, than captivating to them. Many great cities, empires, and ideas, have arisen and might arise, playing the part of a spiritual prostitute, enticing people away from God, away from what is right (Is.23:16-7; Nah.3:4).

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150 Compare the Nazirite Vow, which had given temporary exaltation into holiness from the standard kosher/clean level, the kosher-par having been a step above the unclean—the subpar level—of common humanity. Consider Ac.10:15.

151 Not a marriage party, since along the lines of covenant, brides were married before their wedding, but awaited the marriage consummation.

In the spirit, John considered Daniel, who once lived on the site of Babylon, but never in the spirit of Babylon. Wherever we live, let us spurn the Babylon of the heart. In the spirit, John saw the shamelessness that lives wherever global power reigns. Of course, even as the spirit can work through human creatures, he can work through heavenly creatures. Here he speaks through an angel (17:1), perhaps the one who later showed John a far better woman (21:9). But back to the bad one, to this mother of πορναι/*pornai* (5).[152]

Her global influence appears in various ways, and her international domain covers many 'waters' (1),[153] a term which can mean oceans (CEV) or even rivers: one can think of trade links and contamination of vital waterways. 17:15 underlines the globality of John's expression. She is the link between earthly rulers (2). Babylon was in the Fertile Crescent, but behind the scenes the global prostitute really belongs to the back of beyond, though she's an eye catcher (3). Even her pet Sea Beast looks fashionable in scarlet red, and claims global obedience as if deity: royalty likes scarlet red (Mt.27:28). Of course it does look a bit odd, having seven heads and ten horns (Dan.7), but the picture links one theme with another.

When she does lose her dominance, her kings will quickly fall. Now at one level, it's as if the Sea Beast tires of being her pet, and inspires a new set of world leaders (kings: 12) to make mincemeat out of her (16). At another level, deific sovereignty is behind how the Beast operates (17). Does God work this way to truly assess humanity, trying humanity in different ways even as he did Job (Job 1:11-2; 2:5-

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152 On the singular of this word, *pornē*, is built our word pornography (graphics of nonmarital interpersonal sex). Jesus, speaking against divorce, acknowledged that divorce was justified (not demanded) in cases of *pornē*: Steve H Hakes' *Israel's Gone Global,* 2018, covers this.

153 Speaking of Babylon, *Jeremiah* has a similar expression to John's επι ὑδατων πολλων/*epi hudatōn pollōn* (upon/by many waters: Jr.51:13). Incidentally, the chapterisation varies between the Jeremianic texts. Without going into many waters of technicalities, it's a bit like chs. 46–51 of the Hebrew text (the Nations section) having been cut and pasted (and then sub-divisions jumbled) immediately after Jr.25:13 of the Masoretic Hebrew text.

6)? With Job, part of the reason was to witness righteousness—which Yahweh vouchsafed—to the satan, perhaps not expecting the satan to change, but hoping that his human servants might turn and be saved, as have been many Romans who have witnessed Christians being butchered in the arenas.

Here, however, it is perhaps *unrighteousness* on trial. I wonder, do you ever think that the starry universe watches our great drama, witnessing God's mercy, grace, and judgement? Kingdom may rise, kingdoms may fall, but the word of Yahweh endures forevermore. But what is John's talk about numbers, and what had Ancient Babylon done so wrong?

First, as to numbers, let us consider what they could mean. On the numbers mentioned, we have one of seven plague-pouring angels (1), one prostitute, perhaps with shortterm control over the Sky Beast (1), and that one Beast having seven heads/mountains/kings and ten horns (3,7,9-10). Of these seven heads/mountains/kings, five have fallen (like the Sky Beast: 8), the sixth is in power (unlike the Sky Beast?: 8), and the seventh is to come (like the Sky Beast?: 8).

The missing Sky Beast (Dragon) will follow the seven, having been absent during the sixth—presumably as a king in its own right, not merely a power behind the seven kings which it connects (11). As to the ten horns, they are waiting in the wings, perhaps to reign in tandem with the Sky Beast's next and final manifestation (12,3), hating the unrighteous prostitute and the righteous lamb (14,6).[154]

> Since John spoke of one king being active, it seems reasonable to name a king according to when John had his vision, and to define these kings in terms of the Roman emperors. Biblical scholars are divided as to when that was, and indeed divide over who this John

[154] C S Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress*, speaks of two polar opposite dragons, cold reason and hot emotion, hating each other and hating the Landlord, God, who alone could unite them through their defeat. Back to *Revelation*, the CEV optimistically says that "anyone with wisdom can figure this out" (7), perhaps reminding us that even Jesus was surprised as to how little wisdom his disciples had (Jhn.10:6; Mk.4:13). That they could nevertheless ground the church, speaks hope to us.

was. More anon. The main king-names put forward are those of Nero and of Domitian.

If king six was Nero, do we begin a list with Augustus 'Caesar'—as when the empire began—or with his maternal great-uncle Julius Caesar[155]—as did the ancient Roman historian Suetonius, nephew to Claudius? To put king six as Galba (like Liz Truss as UK prime minister) seems to place too much weight on too little significance, and some skip over the minor pages of history to Vespasian—but why would John have skipped them?

If king six was Domitian, do we begin a list with Galba, and if so why? Or do we again skip—and if so why?—the three minor caesars, and begin with Caligula, the first caesar after Jesus' death? Besides, what of caesars after the eighth (whoever he was)? What of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian?

Or do we skip the whole ideas of individual emperors, and name empires instead? If King Six was Rome, do we begin a list with Old Babylonia—perhaps because of Babylon?[156]

Since John spoke heavily in symbols, it seems to me likely enough that he speaks to us of symbolic kings, or even a central idea based around seven, the number of completion. Considered thus, one could take five as a collective idea for human authorities that have passed, the sixth being what is, and then a short burst to follow, and then a time (eighth) of kosmic resurgence, a resurrection of evil. We could say that the kosmos (the anti-God *world*) has always been bad, is bad, will be bad, and that when we might expect it to end, will again get bad. It could in fact symbolically summarise Rome's power (the seven being its overall dominion, irrespective of how many emperors it has had from start to now). Rome's power could symbolise the kosmic thread always at odds with God, and

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155 Julius/Augustus/Tiberius/Caligula/Claudius/Nero. After Nero, there were three minor caesars, Galba/Otho/Vitellius (all three in one year), then the bigger players Vespasian/Titus/Domitian.

156 Thus, King One = Old Babylon, and then 2# Assyria; 3# New Babylon; 4# Medo-Persia; 5# Graeco-Macedonia. Other big players predated Old Babylon in the Fertile Crescent, such as Sumer, and Aratta before. But why limit empires to this geopolitical region?

prediction (eighth) could symbolise that Rome itself is not the last word of the secret source of iniquity. But whatever its agents, our brother underlines its destruction.

And as to the ten horns, that—a number sometimes symbolising fullness—surely speaks about another set of leaders, also drawing authority and guidance from the Beast from the Sky. That they are a different set, is surely shown by the fact that they have not yet arisen (12). And as deep-seated evil can show a gay face, so it can show a grim. Yes, the kosmos which can offer luxury, can offer leanness. Might it be that many seduced by the promise of pleasure, will find themselves as flies trapped in tyranny, as pleasure is put down by evil?[157] Might not Rome, like mighty Babylon of old, die, only to be replaced by a Persia? And is not the network of fallen man, not like a great city in deep dispute with God and messiah?

Like the Eight, the Ten might think themselves independent of evil—but they are in fact in its pocket. It's like they have handed over their authority to the Sky Beast. They too will go down with this Beast. In God's timing, their ascendency will seem but a brief part of a day. Their opposition is not generally against God as God, but is specifically against the Christian faith. They will rise up to oppose the Lamb from God; he will knock them down. We have the

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157 This putting down of less powerful evil by more powerful evil, is well reflected in C S Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*. A sociologist (Mark Studdock) assumes that his powerful NICE group exists to promote some people to empower all people. No, that is not the plan, replies Filostrato: "I mean it will then be reduced to one person. You are not a fool, are you, my young friend? All that talk about the power of Man over Nature—Man in the abstract—is only for the *canaglia*. You know as well as I do that Man's power over Nature means the power of some people over other people with Nature as the instrument. There is no such thing as Man—it is a word. There are only people. No! It is not Man who will be omnipotent, it is some one person, some immortal person. Alcasan, our Head, is the first sketch of it. The completed product may be someone else. It may be you. It may be me" (1983:178). George Orwell's *Animal Farm* also highlights this idea of all being equal (Communism), but some—its elite—being more equal than others and putting all others down.

privilege to be among the Lamb's people, however much we are knocked down by the Evil Horns.

Do you ask if God is responsible for their evil choice? Maybe, but that is not to say that he is responsible for their evil hearts. Think back to Joseph. His brothers had evil hearts, by Yahweh channelled their hatred into a way to bring good to many (Gen.50:20). Did he not channel the evil of Judas to fit his good design?

Babylon the Prostitute falls by the hands that served her. It's like Rome's empire turns on Rome, as evil implodes. This vision reminds us of Jeremiah's words about the Babylon of his days (Jr.50–1), and about Tyre of Ezekiel's days (Ezk.27).

But hark, for another exalted angel speaks. Nay, he shouts with a voice of triumph: Fallen is Babylon the Great (Rv.18:2). Truly, evil by evil is felled. Her fall is fitting, and its depth is deserved. She has been a great axis of evil, dressed in sweet attire. Or should we say, dressed like a fine polished tomb, with rotting corruption within?

No, she is not the network which we should feel at home with. The biggest problem is when she makes her home within us. The call to come spiritually out of her, is not quite the same as the warning to flee physically from Jerusalem (Mt.24:16). If A and B are opposite evils, then C for the church should be opposite to both, as in an equilateral triangle. Let B persecute C for its Christian orientation and identity, not for ungodly abominations.

Hark! The herald angel speaks as a voice that once encouraged Babylon's enemies to attack her (Jr.50:29). Evil is divided: some weep; some scoff. The Babylonian backers keep well clear, lest they face her fate. Swiftly Oh swiftly, comes change upon society; set opinions die in a day, in an hour. The time of the Eight Kings ends so soon.

Yes, the community of messiah stood opposed to the Prostitute. Those who now oppose his community, those who tacitly agree that it has been right, hate it nonetheless, indeed the more. But we see how that which seems immovably against us, can crumble into the sea. We need wickedness destroyed, as we need cancer to be killed.

So rejoice, for justice is done.[158] So shall all which opposes messiah perish. Yet he—and we are aligned to him—is immovable, for his ground is truth. And the angel casts a mighty stone into the river. Have you not read that by a similar act—in the days of Jeremiah—Seraiah said that Babylon would sink, never to resurface (Jr.51:61-4)?

Should we weep that weddings are off (Rv.18:23)? Nay, say rather that the venue is off, like long ago Jerusalem did die (Jr.7:34). Methinks that some good came from marriages under the Great Prostitute, but was there not folly mixed in, an ideology corrosive to covenant? But cheer up, for do you know, the next talk about brides, wives, is in far far better setting.[159] Therefore let us be merry and gay.

Still Joy in Heaven: 19:1-10

And with Babylon's demise, heaven itself seems to break out in *halleluyahs*. But what means this word? Well, our brother John is of the ethnic-Hebrew people. In their tongue, this word has three parts, which *allēlouia* in our Greek tongue, fails to capture.[160] For in Hebrew, *hallel* is a word for praise. Next, the *u* prompts others to do the praising, and the *yah* says who it is who is to be praised: we are to call upon others to praise Yahweh.[161] Four times the shout goes up. And as an aside, I don't seem to have seen this term in the other

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158 The ESV punctuates as if the mariners invite Christians to rejoice.

159 The terms νυμφη/*numphē* (18:23; 21:2; 21:9; 22:17) and γυνη/*gunē* (19:7; 21:9) are interchangeable in *Revelation*, as 21:9 shows. After the Babylonian setting, the heavenly setting begins with 19:7. Brides were already the wife of their respective bridegroom/husband—betrothal begins marriage covenant, and a wedding follows. On understanding marriage, MEVV Grades = A+ (NABRE/NKJV); B (LEB); C+ (NIV); C- (ERV/NCV/NRSV); D (CEB); D- (CEV/NLT).

160 I do not know why the Greek failed to capture the rough breathing, the H of Hallel. The Greek iota (ι/*i*) can commonly be put as the English J or Y to begin words, such as Jerusalem/Yerusalem or Jesus/Yesus.

161 Many clueless Christian songs throw this exhortation word at God, or at the lord, as if telling deity to praise itself!

new covenant scriptures. Here it's linked to Yahweh having commendably punished Babylon.

> Desertion by the deserted, leading to self-inflicted wounds, is a biblical theme. Gomer, Hosea's adultery-prone wife deserted him; he then deserted her; she suffered alone; he invited her home. *Romans* carries this same theme: like Gomer many, though able to see God's provision, have followed their own lusts and preferred to block him, thus being blocked by him—he gave them over to their baser desires—and they fell into all kinds of confusion, exchanging right for wrong (1:18-32). *James* speaks (I think to Christians) about sinners moving towards God, who would move towards them (4:8).

Now, having ended tainted weddings in Babylon, a very untainted wedding is celebrated by the Lamb.[162] The idea here is, I guess, that those redeemed by messiah—as if he had been a sacrificial lamb—have also been delivered by messiah—who like an apocalyptic warrior could again be symbolised as a lamb, a mythical fighting-animal of great power. And those people are now pictured corporately as a bride getting ready to begin a new phase in life, the fulfilment—perhaps beginning—of adult life and a new level of joy.

And doesn't she look beautiful! It's amazing to see both you and I in her unblemished face, for she is the church. No longer do we see the church in bedraggled rags, bruised and bloodied by her enemies, or blemished by her own sins. In these days of our persecution, it is good to be reminded that we are blessed, even if we stumble. Her wedding dress is of pure and shining linen, as if all wrongdoing is past. She is the fourth woman to appear in *Revelation*, standing in stark contrast to the Great Prostitute. And do you remember the woman dressed in sunshine? Wasn't she a stark contrast to Jezebel?

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162 For MEVV, the CEB/CEV/ERV/LEB/NABRE/NCV/NIV/NLT get it right by *wedding*; the NKJV/NRSV get it wrong by *marriage*.

Now if the bride is at the wedding feast, is it just possible that the guests are from among those who neither aligned for, nor against, the Lamb. Are the guests Godfearers, as Cornelius had been? Or has the symbolism broken down here? Yet come to think of it, neither Naaman nor Moses were in the messianic bride,[163] and even Naomi didn't urge her daughters-in-law to even join the Sinai Level of Ethnic Israel. Is there not a wider heavenly hope, than merely those who in mortal life indwell the messianic community?

As for John, why, he was so chuffed to see this vision, that in gratitude he fell down to worship the angel. And why not, since biblically true worship is not limited only to deity? Oh, of course I remember silly old Herod.[164] And of course I know that our lord told Satan off for pretending to be lord over Sinai. But do you remember that righteous Lot *worshipped* angels (Gen.19:1), that Abigail *worshipped* David (1 Sam.25:23), that Ruth *worshipped* Boaz (*Ruth* 2:10), that Jacob *worshipped* Esau (Gen.33:3), and that Nebuchadnezzar *worshipped* Daniel (Dan.2:46)? If there is a problem here, isn't it to do with the setting? Here, for instance, John fell down to worship a mere messenger—a fellow servant—and that messenger simply redirected John's attention: focus on the Author, not the postie. Indeed, identified in Christ we are in rank above mere angels (Heb.2:9). But if in principle we ought to worship only God, was John such a rank pagan that he had considered worshipping otherwise?[165]

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163 This raises questions as to whether the 'church' of Sinai (*qahal*; Ex.16:3 *et al*) was, so to speak, a Part A to a Part B of the church of christ.

164 Herod Agrippa 1 of Judea, grandson of King Herod the Great (Ac.12:23).

165 As regards Satan's false offer to hand the nations over to Israel-Jesus (Mt.4:10/ Lk.4:8), that authority was only in the hands of God, who was as a god to Israel (ie spiritual sovereign), and who intended to do just that at the spiritual level at the proper time. As such, God was to be the prime object of worship by Israel. In fact, in the context of Rv.19:10, the literal context seems to mean God the father, so does Rv.19:10 therefore rule out worship to the son and the spirit? I think it's merely the situational focus.

Section D': Riders Still in Action—human focus: 19:11–20:10

Still Retributive Judgement: 19:11-21

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Though we linger for the bridegroom, John looks at a warrior. Not quite a rider in shining armour, but one already bloodstained from his crucifixion, yet ready for battle. Experienced Roman commanders wear red, to show that they have gone through battle. Bear in mind that though the Horns have defeated Babylon, they remain as enemies of the Bride.

Like an earlier rider, the warrior messiah too has a white horse—white for victory. Messiah has earlier defeated the powers of death. Now we see that he will ultimately defeat the powers of darkness—but the end is not yet. Why do some Romans call Jesus, meek and mild? Little do they know him! He can be gentle enough among lambs, but savage enough among wolves.

Now—and later—he is rightly called *the king of kings and lord of lords* (Rv.19:16). Now that is to distance him above the kings and lords of the kosmos below. Over his enemies, he has authority and power. Once when sorting out a church in Ephesus, brother Timothy was told that God the father was *king of kings and lord of lords* (1 Tm.6:15).[166] So to whom does this title really belong?

God the son noncarnate is coeval and coequal with the father and the spirit, but Jesus the man is subservient, and sought to do *his father's* will. If pushed, I guess we could say that God the father is the king of the king of kings, and lord of the lord of lords. For we must never fail to see the wood of deity, for the tree of incarnation. In their settings, the terms simply mean that God, and messiah, are both as immortal lord-king over all *mortal* kings and lords.

But look, see, an angel of heaven now invites the vultures to prepare to clean up the field after the fight—carnage is very messy. In this

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166 This ties in with the secret name of 19:12—deity? For if a name reveals, who fully knows the name of deity except deity? "Yahweh is the god of gods, and lord of lords" (Dt.10:17); "your god is the god of gods, and lord of kings" (Dan.2.47). There is a depth/side to Jesus, which is beyond us.

battle, messiah's enemies, from the sovereigns down to the horse and standard foot soldiers—people of every kind—will die.[167] I see the enemy force led by the Beast and mortal kings: they are the aggressors, gathered to make war on the rider and his army. Behold, I see the enemy defeated. The leading Beast, along with the Earth Beast—that false prophet—are captured and cast into the Lake of Fire, which burns with sulphur as if a volcano. But are there three Beasts, or one Beast with three faces, I wonder. I now see clearly that many who received the Mark of the Beast, were deceived, their worship being misguided and misdirected. Alas, their reward for their folly is but death, and spiritual death in the body is the lot of all those who willingly reject messiah.

The True Church Still Stands: 20:1-10

Next, John sees the Age of the Church as an Age of Liberty (Rv.20:1-10), when even we who were ethnically Goyim—the unclean nations—could join God's True Israel, which began by resurrection.[168] See, alongside the outcome of the spiritual war which we wage, he sees an angel sent from heaven to bind the dragon, the satan. Now through his eyes we see all three Beasts as defeated foes. The dragon himself is bound in unbreakable chains, and imprisoned for a millennium.[169]

Remember how earlier our brother spoke of a fallen angel having been given the key to the abyss (Rv.9:1-2)? Behold, he now speaks of an unfallen angel having been given that self-same key. Truly, God is uncreated sovereign over all created sovereignties, and releases

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167 Will all who opposed messiah (Israel 3), face ultimate hell? Will all who opposed Ethnic Israel (Israel 2), face ultimate hell? Isn't Sapphira with the lord, though slain by him?

168 John's Gospel makes a big play of the true (αληθινος/*alēthinos*) being what was anticipated by rich and meaningful symbols, such as the true temple (Jhn.2:21) having been messiah. By extension it is his church.

169 Norse mythology speaks of the evil Fenris Wolf, chained by Thor and imprisoned in a cave until the Final Battle (*Ragnarok*). Even so, it did not preclude other evils under the same father (*Loki*) from being at work.

or binds all the major players. However, let us note that he has bound the dragon's reach, not all of his ways. Do you see, therefore, that this picture shows us that the dragon cannot marshal his entire forces against the church, and that therefore the eschatological battle will be in God's time?[170]

Yes, though we shall lose our bodies to death, with the lord we shall reign above as our initial resurrection, as we await the second resurrection, when each shall put on an immortal body as clothing. This joy is for all who, vindicated by messiah,[171] sit with him—and he reigns above.[172] Yes, the dragon may slay us, yet death is but royal release for those who at heart oppose him.[173]

But let us look to the dénouement, to the final battle, which is like unto Ezk.38–9. For at the end the dragon's fate shall be like to that of the other Beasts (Rv.19:20), and the battle like to Armageddon (Rv.16:16). For he shall go out not with a whimper, but with a bang.

Whenever the millennium of limited freedom will end, it shall be that the Church shall be as if finally trapped by Gog and Magog—ancient imagery now used for the full power of the kosmos, from the north, south, east, and west. Yet the greater our danger, the greater will be the dragon's defeat—from an abyss to a lake of fire: true punishment indeed. Is our Jerusalem not Christ himself, in whom we dwell, even as in him we symbolise True Jerusalem?

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170 This agrees with Mt.16:18: church evangelism binds people to, or releases people from, the kosmos, and the church cannot die off.

171 The idea is possibly of the world's judgement given against them, but heaven's "judgment…given in their favour" (CEB).

172 'Above' is picture language, for lordship and another dimension.

173 In John's days, Roman executions by beheading, were reserved for Roman citizens; in our days, Muslims are more likely to behead God's martyrs. John's meaning, however, is more likely to be that *even* those executed for being witnesses—having God's mark; being of Christ's side—will not miss out, rather than meaning that they would be the *only* Christians to gain. Perhaps add the words, "as a generality", or "typically", when reading these words.

Chapter 8

Victory Enjoyed

Rev.20:11–22:21

Section C': God's Throne Still Stands: 20:11-5

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. You may ask, What will it look like once the cosmological war has ended? Into this our brother has seen, and has given us a glimpse. So, let us now look up, and see how the New Age shall unfold. Let us see how the story comes to its end. Or, should we say, let us see how the flower will open at last, upon the stem which is Christ Jesus?

Daniel spoke of the Ancient of Days as enthroned after his victory against giant apocalyptic beasts. Now John sees a majestic white throne, too. Does the colour not fit deity? Is it not associated with stones of victory, with the robes of the loyal, and with angels?[174] Surely, the judge is God through his anointed one (Jhn.5:22).

It is not that the material world and sun and stars, will perish. It is that the old order of powers will be no more, for they who held the keys will then be powerless before the true keyholder.[175] None will be too significant, or too insignificant, to escape the Great Assize. Nor will they be judged according to their people, but according to their deeds. Yes, all will be judged as individuals (Ezk.18:20).

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174 Rv.1:14; 2:17; 3:4-5; 4:4.

175 The NT has some symbolism as if such perish. However, in Paul's vision even the creaturely kingdoms of Earth yearn for messiah's return, to be unbound rather than exterminated (Rm.8). We must look inside of envelope-terms, in order to read the letters within.

Did not Daniel see similar judgement, with a court in session and the record books consulted?[176] Will not the hearts of all be finally disclosed by examining their works, and seeing them in the context of their hearts?[177] Are we not to take comfort, in spite of all Rome's unrighteousness towards us, in this fact that ultimately God will eternally divide the righteous from the unrighteous?

John has spoken of an earth and a sky Beast, and also of a sea Beast. Even as Earth and Sky have fled, so the Sea yields up it subjects to God. Yes, Sea, Death, and Hades, yield up their captives to be judged, and they themselves are to be judged. Yes, Death and Hades will trouble us no more (Rv.20:14) and the Raging Sea will be no more (21:1). And they too who are at one with the Dragon, will share his fate. And even as the righteous dead have reigned above, awaiting the second resurrection—their final fate—are not the unrighteous dead subjugated below, awaiting the second death—their final fate?

But what is this Lake of Fire, this final descent, this second death, God's fiery unpresence? Is it not where the old order of evil is headed, their true home away from purity, their flight from God's embrace? Is it not an alternative dimension to the City of God, the Celestial Cosmos? Who are they who would desire the warming winter hearth to the burning volcano heat, yet would rather choose the latter to escape God? Well may we mourn the twisted choice of

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176 Dan.7:10

177 We should dismiss superstition, such as the idea that Christians can't sin, or that if we can sin, then our ultimate destination will be based on our last work, or a weighing of our rights/wrongs as Christians, or even as human beings. Paul wrote much about works of vice and virtue even among Christians; James likewise. Some evil works are done by the pure in heart, perhaps reluctantly under pain of death, or through mistaken conscience. Be assured, the Book of Life will include all who truly desire righteousness, in spite of their many evil works within mortal life: examined, acts show motive. Hakes 2018 argues that even people who died before birth/deeds, will be separated according to their attitude towards God: Predispositionalism/Predilectionism.

their hearts, even as we rejoice in the choice of ours, and that even in this life we have welcomed that City into our hearts.

Section B′: The Church Still Stands—rewards: 21:1-8

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Behold, does the Final Judgement not have a positive, as well as a negative? We are spiritually divided from fallen Rome, but John foresees a permanent separation between the good and the evil. Let us keep this hope in mind.

Established society shall be replaced by established spirituality, for what is of the First Adam—both high and low—shall be replaced by what is of the Second Adam—both high and low. The chaos of the human sea, shall be replaced by deific harmony. And did not Isaiah the prophet, likewise foresee a new heaven and a new earth (Is.65:17)?[178] Did he not see the natural world, as raised out of the life of tooth and claw (25)?[179]

Section A′: Looking from Visions: 21:9–22:21

Theophany in Glory: 21:9–22:5

I, Sonafets, shall speak again. Must all our women marry? Nay, they can forego the male, for that exists only on the biological level. But none of us can escape the masculine, and what is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it. Thus as we wait to see God, picture us—all together as the church—as she who is a celibate wife to messiah, and will become as a chaste wife to him. Of course we are talking pictures, metaphors, shallow yet meaningful images for what is too deep for our imagination to dive to the depths. It is as a wedding celebration of life, not the mourning of death. We are to picture ourselves—corporately as the

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178 John's use of καινος/*kainos* (*new*), carries the idea of new in kind, a never-before-ness, a macro-evolution beyond genomes.

179 How such would literally adapt bio-evolutionary laws, we can but imagine. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), Klaatu has three DNA layers: humanity had to cut to his inmost being. Prophecy's envelope-terms can hold symbolic layers, which we must probe. But Paul did say that literally the natural world yearns for the old humanity to be replaced by the new (Rm.8:22).

church—as God's Holy City, True Jerusalem, already enthroned in heaven. Will that day not be as Christ's holy people being fully manifest in our world, which will rejoice in our manifestation as children of God, and in our fullness as the bride of Christ?

Again our vision goes back to the heavenly city, the redeemed like a bride, which will one day be ready for the wedding, the next phase in salvation history. What we see of the glory of the Bride-City-Jerusalem, makes the Prostitute-City-Babylon (Is.13:19) look shabby and sickly in comparison. Indeed, idealisation of future Jerusalem should surely inspire us to seek to enrich society-now, by patterning it on the society-future.[180] Ah, the fair beauty of the redeemed.

And what are we from John's standpoint, as God's city? We see our glory expressed in terms of marvellous colours of precious gems and precious metal.[181] We see our massive solid[182] structure beyond full comprehension, and built upon apostolic rock.[183] We see our holiness, too. God and messiah are accessed directly, not indirectly by any mediating temple. Nor are sacrifices for atonement needed, for perfect fellowship shall reign. Behold, with darkness and dark deeds banished (for God and messiah will then enlighten us), there will be no evil threats to threaten. We shall be as a city with always-open gates, as a trading city ever enriched.[184]

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180 The NT has several pictures representing the church: temple, building, bride, shrine, body, etc. By "from heaven", John underlined that it's God's. We cannot make the heavenly Jerusalem, but we can try to paint its glory into society.

181 John used rich poetry, such as transparent gold/jasper (both are literally opaque not translucent), and rich diversity, and small pearls as if large enough to walk through.

182 In literal terms, its footprint is about 75% of Australia's, and its top would be in the 1,200°C exosphere level. If the city were a man, the international space station might crash into him midway up his shinbones—ouch.

183 Rv.7 likewise spoke about structure (12 x 12 x 1,000) beyond full count (4,9). Here it has apostolic significance (12), multiplied by the cube of 10 (a number of completeness), and HxWxD forms a perfect cube, as did the Most Holy Place.

184 Rv.21:24 picks up Is.60:3,5, and Rv.21:26 picks up Is.60:11. By 'the nations' (τα

Will this day not be the final connection between God and this world, even a type of incarnation and transcarnation? For at a new level we will be together, Immanuel. We are and will be Jerusalem, that connect where in olden days he put down his name (Dt.12:5).

Such is our hope, though even now we are of True Jerusalem, True Zion, the True Temple, even as messiah himself is our priest and king. Yet it is also like we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of God the living one, not to some lifeless idol (Heb.12:22). It is as if he is our Jerusalem, and we are his (1 Jhn.4:13). But beyond the veil, God being ours will walk not with merely two, nor even with one ethnic nation, nor even with merely the bride, but with redeemed man.[185]

Yes, as we look closer into this vision, we see allusions back to Eden. Eden was dim pattern of True Eden to be. Of course to some extent, Ethnic Israel was Eden (Level 2), and at a higher level we are, but we still await its final level fulfilment.[186] And what do the leaves represent, if not our hope for wholeness, soundness, wellness, which we know in part but await for fullness? Again, even as the nations have been featured as hostile, so a time comes for them to feature as friends, lovers of God who knew not Christ. We shall be united by Jesus, for the river of life flows from him and from God.

On the one hand, God shall quench our thirst. The *Visio Dei* will be as a name on our brows; a shine upon our faces. On the other hand, unredeemed humanity will not undermine the Everlasting Jerusalem. God himself has spoken. Yes, finally celebration, for

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εθνη/*ta ethnē*: Rv.21:24)—an OT expression primarily for the goyim, the noncovenant people—is there a hint that these are hidden greys not normally covered in *Revelation*'s black and white painting, yet like Cornelius had been inclined towards God and so will be ultimately brought in to his kingdom?

185 In order: Level 1 (Common), L2 (Sinai), L3 (Christian), L4 (Everlasting). *Infra*

186 There are often four biblical Levels: for instance, Abra[ha]m had an exodus update from the Common Level (L1 to L1+); Ethnic Israel had an exodus into Sinai Level (L2, now reverted to L1+); we have had an exodus into the Christian Level (L3), and await the next exodus into the Everlasting Level (L4).

God's hand will wipe away our bitter tears, and death will have passed away as a chapter ended by his will.

The horrors of today will be swallowed up by the fruit of tomorrow, and we shall worship in full knowledge and bliss,[187] seeing at last see his face—their face, for that face is as one.[188] Our brother John reminds us that we will reign unendingly—alongside deity.

Participants in Glory: 22:6-17

But at last, we come towards the close of the revelation to our brother John. Before John faded back to our current world, the Angel of the Bowls, who has been showing him wonders to come, now assures him that the ultimate lord—who is God, the heavenly lord to those prophets loyal to him—has indeed sent him to show John the future. He seems to speak words from messiah, even as long ago the Angel of Yahweh spoke words from Yahweh.

And yet did John mistake him to be messiah? For John fell down to worship him. As I have said, Jacob's worship of Esau was right, so why was John's worship wrong? But then, by reason of eldership, Esau was lord to Jacob; by reason of royalty, David was lord to Abigail. But here the angel was not his lord—v7 had been indirect—but simply a fellow servant alongside John, and worshipping God who sent them both, was the proper focus.[189] But

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187 I suspect that the universe is too huge simply to be irrelevant backdrop, and that it is to be the playground for God's redeemed children, and that worship will be an ongoing attitude of cosmic awe through creation towards its creator.

188 Similarly, Jhn.10:30 speaks of the father and son being one, where 'one' in the Greek *cannot* mean one person, but *can* mean one will.

189 Assuming that John was the apostle/sent-one by that name, we may note that the angel too was apostolic (αποστελλω/*apostellō*: 6); John was a servant (δουλος/*doulos*: 6), and the angel was a fellow-servant (συν-δουλος/*sun-doulos*: 9). Here the text says 'worship God': only one MEVV adds, 'only' (viz the NLT, following the TLB). Likewise with Rv.19:10, where of the MEVV, the CEV/NLT (not following the TLB) add 'only'. Though focused on God the father, the text does not rule out worshipping God the son and God the spirit.

it is good to see that with our focus on God, his angels will work with us.

And the angel commanded John not to store the record of this revelation in a safe place as if for later times, but to put it in the hands of fellow believers, because it would speak to us now. Though we are under the heel of Rome, we are under the hand of God.

Until messiah returns, things shall go on as they will. Evil people may continue to be evil (God won't stop them); good people may continue to be good (the Dragon can't stop them): each must choose, if offered, whether to leave or to enter Christian Jerusalem, and God himself commands all to be as they will (Ezk.33:12-20).[190]

The lord Jesus himself puts a word in now, personally promising to come soon. Although he is with us by his spirit—by his spirit returned (Ac.1:1)—in a real sense he has not yet returned. He will return soon, and yet two days to him might mean two millennia for us. But he would have us bear his return in mind, with all that that entails. Yet let us not attempt to live on emotional highs, whether of hope or of fear. Let us carry within a sense of carrying on as we ought to live, until our lord deems it right to return to establish the new cosmic order. May our faithfulness greet his return.

With his father (1:8; 21:6), he shares the deific title of Alpha and Omega (22:13); first and the last (1:17; 2:8—of messiah); the beginning

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[190] Expressed as deeds-based salvation, there is good biblical reason to treat such as reflecting the inner heart (turns from/repents) in either direction. The comprehensive structure of systematic theology is required to build a working picture, else we have the idea of daisy flowers, where each petal pulled (she loves me/she loves me not/she loves me…) might seem to toggle between ultimate fate. If I die on a good note, it's everlasting heaven for me; if I live one moment later and die on a bad note, it's everlasting hell for me. Even Islam (like Egyptian myth) makes better sense than that, with every deed being weighed, and a dollop of grace able to swing the balance.

and the end (21:6—of God).[191] Is he not the permanent temporal mode of the uncreated eternal second person of deity?

In one sense, by loyalty under persecution we move from red bloodstains to white privilege within messiah's kingdom (Rv.7:14). In another sense, we are blessed if we wash in purity within his kingdom (Rv.22:14). Did our brother say that only by being loyal will the redeemed know ultimate redemption? I think not, but he surely meant not less than that only such believers were fit to know this seventh blessing he has spoken of.[192] Was he himself not as one who walked undefiled in loyalty to his father and to us, to the cross?

Should we not befit our kingdom as we ought—and as he did—and be welcomed in high honour? Unlike Adam and Eve who lost the right to access the Tree of Life, we will be granted that right of access in the True Eden. Outside of the holy, will be the unholy, pictured as unclean dogs—sexual immorality, murder, ignoring God, and being happy to selfishly deceive, representing their vices.

Yēsous himself has given this revelation through John to us within his care, and indeed in general to all his churches: it is for sharing widely. It is the desire of the spirit, and the bride, that Jesus returns. But until that day dawns, the invitation to all is to drink the Water of Life daily from his cup—from he who is metaphorically our Christian Eden, and shall be our Everlasting Eden when he returns. As Brother Paul used to say, keep in step with the spirit. But to walk daily, we must drink daily from Eden.

Epilogue: 22:18-21

Now all has been said. John has added that none should add to, nor take from, this prophetic document. His meaning I take to be that only those who worship the Dragon, will seek to change the

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191 I consider these synonymous phrases. For English language, A&Z are the beginning and end letters, the first and the last, as in Greek A&Ω. It's akin to the Trihagion—thrice holy—of Is.6:3, where repetition says 'beyond compare'.

192 The sever makarisms—μακαριοι/blesseds—are 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14.

prophecy to change its outcome. This crime and punishment theme is like to a *lex talionis*.[193] Such false elements within the church—though not within Christ—shall have the offer of life taken from them, and suffer their choice of hell.

He who witnesses to this prophetic revelation, tells us that he is coming soon. And we add our welcome: *Come, lord Jesus*. May his grace be to all who read and proclaim this revelation.

Amen

[193] Compare Dt.4:2. Arguably, those born *to* Israel were not always heart and soul *of* Israel (Jhn.8:44), even as John's Letters spoke of a foreign element within the church (1 Jhn.2:19). Ironically, for misciting from Dt.4, we could accuse Smalley of taking away from God's name, by putting LORD as Lord (584). But then, curiously, even if we write LORD, we take away God's name. But John was not saying that genuine Christians will be ultimately damned if they, with godly intention, accidentally take away from the Bible's text, or accidentally add somewhat to it. It is said that no two NT manuscripts are exactly alike—are copyists damned to deepest hell, or plagued with hottest coals of fire? Intentionality is key, along with their motivation to modify.

Chapter 9

Miscellaneous

Authorship and the Canon

Internally the letter is prefaced as by a John (1:4). Even if there were many Johns, who but John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, could assume that his name, without any further description, would identify him to his contemporaries as authoritative? There are marked similarities with the Gospel, such as the Logos (Word) term used nowhere else in the NT, Christ as Lamb (though the Greek terms differ), and as Shepherd. But its bazaar style is extremely different from the polished work of *John's Gospel*, and persuaded the C3 Christian scholar Dionysius of Alexandria, to deny that John the Apostle wrote it, thinking—on somewhat scant evidence—that another famous John had also lived and had his body buried at Ephesus.[194] Some accept that a writer's style can vary by subject, but argue that John focused on Family, and *Revelation* on Fury: "the very considerable difference in ways of thinking would seem to rule out" John the apostle, and confine the question to how Johannine it is (Marshall 570), according to some.

Various ideas to explain its style and link to John, have been put forward. These include 1# *Revelation* having been written by a different John; 2# the apostle John having written *Revelation* in Aramaic and someone having translated it weirdly yet wonderfully

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[194] Dionysius believed that John the Apostle had written *John*, and that John the Elder had written *Revelation*. Many nowadays say that the 'Elder' had written *John*, and denying that the Apostle wrote *Revelation*, suggest a third John. Although genuine questions may be asked, some perhaps had a hidden agenda, in that by reducing or removing the biblical canon, they can remove certain principles and directives which clash with their preferred worldview (Jg.21:25).

into Greek; 3# a Johannine 'school/college' having written it in the name of their apostle; 4# the apostle having written it under (or reflecting back to his) ecstatic revelation (eg Zahn). Dionysius' objections can get a reasonable reply,[195] but the fact that he was an ancient devout Christian, should at least caution against dismissing all current doubts of apostolic authorship as heretical. Externally, most Western Christians at least as early as Justin Martyr (c.140), believed that John the apostle had written it; later Dionysius persuaded the East that John the apostle had not written it.

Some argue that it was written in, or just after, the time of Nero (ie the 60s), since 1# 17:9-10 might link the time immediately after the persecution by Nero, the 5th Emperor from Augustus (= king?) and 6th from Caesar; 2# after Nero many believed in his return (Nero redivivus = Rv.17:11?); and his name translated into Hebrew from Greek adds up to 666, and from Latin in Hebrew = 616 (13:18).[196]

On the other hand, the ancient fathers (eg Irenaeus and Eusebius) were certain that it was written in the time of Domitian (ie the 90s). The majority opinion plumps for the time of Domitian: "it must be admitted that a date towards the close of the century would allow more time for the [internal church] conditions to develop" (Guthrie 955). Smalley suggested the reign of Vespasian, saviour of Rome, with Domitian in the wings (3).

It took quite a while for the church to see that it was important to agree on which writings doing the rounds, were foundational to Christianity. Initially only Christian folk wrote Christian stuff, and by and large there wasn't any real dispute about what was genuine, and what genuine stuff was basic. Many teachers had weight within their local churches, and would look to formulate their local congregations around apostolic teachings, especially from the Pentecostal apostles. Paul was soon recognised as of equal

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195 See Guthrie 934.

196 Various ancient languages used letters for numbers. Some MSS read 616, though possibly through attempts to fix the Beast's number to Gaius Caesar (spelt the Greek way).

standing, having had a direct visitation from messiah himself, and having direct links with the Twelve[197] to verify and formulate his beliefs. That verification link, of course, ended with their deaths, and although some might claim to have met them 'in spirit', such claimants cannot verify their claims. Within the bubble of primary witnesses of the C1, some writings have seemed to the early church leaders to carry primary weight as a new parcel of deific authority.

In the early years of the C2, a Christian-influenced man—perhaps indeed a Christian—disagreed with much of the existing Christian material. He had a particular beef with what he called the Jewish divinity,[198] and argued that there was a supreme being who had generated many divinities, who in turn, like ripples in a pond, generated sub-divinities, with each ripple misunderstanding more and more the mind of the Central Being. Together these divinities were called the *plērōma* (*fullness*).

It wasn't long before this man, named Marcion, was denounced in Christian circles as being the supreme heretic.[199] The point here is that he faced many writings within the established church, which he simply couldn't swallow, because they presupposed that messiah (whom Marcion accepted though misinterpreted) had built on the foundation of the ancient Israelite and Jewish canon. In response to questions about these writing, Marcion drew up a list of writings

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197 Nowadays I have no qualms about calling Matthias the Twelfth Apostle. Thus the symbolic figure of Twelve was in place for the symbolic launching of the church at Pentecost. I reject the idea, Apostolic Succession, and suspect that we have had tens of thousands of apostles, though none since the C1 have, IMO, been canonical, and by the C2 the NT canon of foundational, core, documents, was fixed in existence, though not in acceptance.

198 To be systematic, I prefer to reword the older poetical pointers in ways that express where they were pointing, using philosophical language. Thus, I translate Marcion, *et al*, along the lines that a divinity is a lesser being than deity—our frame of reference. Hence, angels may be said to be divine/divinities (*theioi*), though they are not deities (*theoi*).

199 That he did not represent authentic Christianity, is for convenience simply assumed here, rather than argued for. It can be studied elsewhere.

he would argue from, which basically limited him to Paul, or at least Paul without Paul's OT links, which Marcion said must have been added to Paul. Some nowadays also wish to squeeze out the bits of Paul—and the OT—which don't comfortably fit their ideology, since they are uncomfortable with those Bible bits.

Part of the church's response to Marcion, was to draw up its own list of messianic writings, which it would happily argue from, which included an accurate Paul plus most of what we now have. Perhaps there were other lists, which we no longer have, but from what have been unearthed, we can see that *Revelation*, unsurprisingly, was excluded by Marcion but was generally held and never repudiated by the church. For a while some parts of the church gave certain importance to some later Christian writings. For instance, the C2 *Shepherd of Hermas*, written within the church at Rome by one of its bishops, was recommended reading by that church.

Official lists of canonical messianic writings, were based on three criteria: 1# direct or indirect apostolicity; 2# orthodoxy, based on a direct tie-in to the teachings of Jesus and his core apostles,[200] and excluding any conflicting teaching; and 3# catholicity—that it had proved itself by widespread use and relevance to the wider church at large. This effectively precludes any additional material.

Rejecting both the broader Apostolic Succession and narrower Cessationism ideas, in principle I accept that there are current day apostles and prophets, but I reject the idea that their words have any value above the subcanonical. If verifiable by Scripture, their words are acceptable. If non-verifiable by Scripture, their words may be acceptable. If falsifiable by Scripture, we should deny their words and question the speaker.

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[200] This works on the belief that the spirit only permitted those writings to go into general public circulation, if they lacked any errors of substance. And indeed, general belief holds that the spirit indeed inspired their writing once they were totally in line in substance with the truth of which they wrote. Ie, they wrote only truth, and did not present any imponderables that they might have had.

John the Baptist was a biblical prophet, but still spoke falsifiable words flowing from a false idea of messiah (Mt.11:3). Peter was a biblical apostle, but still taught by deed a false gospel (Gal.2:12), even contesting with the lord about it (Ac.10:14). Presumably John came right in the end; Peter became right at least by the Council of Jerusalem (Catholicity), where he referred back to Ac.10:15 (Ac.15:8) and Gal.2:16 (Ac.15:11). Apostles and prophets are as human today as they were human then, and should be open to a learning process.[201]

Terms, Themes, and Things

The idea of loading lordship with divinity status, infected egotism within the Roman Empire, perhaps peaking in the reign of Domitian—*dominus et deus* (lord and god).[202] The term *the lord* "is most often used in the New Testament of Jesus, a usage found in *Revelation* (11:8; 22:20, etc). But in [*Revelation*] it more often refers to the father" (Morris 51): the term *almighty*, used nine times for God, is not used elsewhere in the NT. This lordship theme makes it a shared theme of sovereignty, weighed more heavily towards God the father. For contrast, it is sometimes linked with the term *God*, and perhaps alludes to the highest relationship of *Genesis*—Yahweh Elohim, translated into the Greek OT as *LORD GOD* (capitalise however you wish).

But of these keywords, by far the biggest is *God*. This is always a contrastive term, excluding Jesus (eg 21:22), who is called his *son*, his *word*/*logos* (2:18; 19:13). The term *father* is a contrastive term,

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201 Of interest—I neither rave nor roast him—Benny Hinn in 2019 rejected the falsifiable Prosperity Gospel, in favour of a verifiable biblical position.

202 He might well have enjoyed hearing such flattery, without insisting on it, but an Imperial Cult did insist on a divine status of the emperors, which helped unite the Empire in common worship and cultic obedience. Those holding Nero to be a divinity, might draw more comfort than if he were simply a caesar. Perhaps it also helped to end Rome's polytheism, for seeing human weaknesses—if divine weaknesses—hardly enhanced confidence in unseen deities. Emperors generally hoped for death to elevate them to the divine (*divus*) level, not the deity (*deus*) level. Compare Greek *theotēs* to *theiotēs*.

excluding us (eg 1:6). The term *lamb* features less than half as much as *God*, and carries both the idea of atonement, and of military might. The terms *Yeshua/Jesus*, and *messiah/christ*, are used about half the times of *lamb*.

Theologically, the son's deity does not override the father's primacy. In *Revelation*, the functional (*economic*) subordination of the son to the father is clear, along with hints of ontological (*essential*) parity. These terms, legitimately adding to the mix of systematic theology, should be read first in John's framework for his *Revelation*.

Whose god is God? That is, who missionally is God committed to, and are also formally committed to him? To highlight that in relationship to Ancient Israel, we should say that Yahweh was often thought of as one god compared to others, and we should write 'others gods', instead of 'other Gods', and write Yahweh as 'a god', not as 'a God', avoiding artificial capitalisation which conceals—rather than translates—the underlying polytheism. Sadly, Bible translations dare not do this, lest their good ships are spoilt by a ha'porth of tar. Good translation can put readers off![203] 2 Sam.7:22 rightly capitalises as philosophic monotheism (CEV: "you alone are God"): and for 1 Sam.2:2; 1 Kg.8:23; 1 Chr.17:20; and 2 Chr.6:14, the CEV bravely and well says that there is no *other god* like Yahweh.[204]

The NIV pays a tad of respect to pagan perspective. Breaking ranks with the other MEVV, it has the Philistines contrasting "the god of Israel" to "Dagon our god", though hastily commenting that Philistia moved the ark of "the God of Israel" (1 Sam.5:7-8)[205]—I bewail its policy to revert to capitalisation. I believe that *god* should be the standard way—not the exceptional way—to present the polytheism of that place and time. Ethnic Israel had rank and file folk who

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203 See D A Carson's, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Call for Realism*.

204 The CEB affirms this approach for Solomon's Temple Dedication (1 Kg.8:23// 2 Chr.6:14).

205 Likewise, 1 Sam.6:6 (NIV), whereas again the CEV reverts to tradition. F F Bruce argued that translations with less to lose should be a little braver, primers to help translations with more to lose, to slowly improve.

simply assumed that they were only to worship their exclusive god, Yahweh, while their neighbouring nations had a wide diversity of goddesses and gods whom Yahweh could defeat. Polytheism was how they and their classmates spoke, although their teachers at times spoke the advanced language of monotheism.

Comparing English Bible versions, in my tests the CEV is least inclined—perhaps without realising it—to follow the standard pattern of polytheistic language patterns within the NT. Good translation, which looks to put things into our terms, can help us to be better monotheists. It both saddens and amuses me that Muslims speak of the Christian god, that Christians talk of the Islamic god, though both sides rightly insist that there is only one god, God. Now if Muslims speak of the Christian *concept* about God, and Christians talk of the Islamic *concept* about God, then both monotheistic sides speak in monotheistic language. At the end of the day, there is only one god, God, but there are many ideas about him.

I wish we abolished polytheistic talk. Translators could help this process more than they have done. After all, in spite of the situational settings of the NT writers, those writers were philosophic monotheists, even though they sometimes slipped back into less systematic talk. Contrasting to the NIV, see how the CEV solves this problem.[206] I generally remove false capitalisations, to highlight the underlying polytheism of god-types.[207]

- "God is not a god of disorder", to "God wants everything to be done…in order" (1 Cor.14:33)
- "our god and father", to "God our father" (Gal.1:4)

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206 But the CEV is no miracle cure. Firstly, its policy is inconsistent: eg Heb.12:29. Secondly, it sometimes foists polytheism upon the text: eg Lk.1:69. Still, in my tests its dimness is as light to darkness, and only the NLT comes fairly close.

207 IMO 'reverential' capitalisation sometimes takes on a quasi-superstitious character. The Amplified Bible often footnoted thus: "Capitalized because of what He is, the spotless Son of God, not what the speaker may have thought He was." For the KJV, a he was a he not a He.

- "the god of peace" to "God, who gives peace" (Php.4:9)
- "the god of all grace", to "God shows undeserved kindness" (1 Pt.5:10)
- "The Lord, the god who inspires the prophets", to "The Lord God controls the spirits of his prophets" (Rv.22:6)

"All the 'gods' in other nations are nothing but statues, but Yahweh made the heavens" (Ps.96:5). John's polemic probably used such poetic polytheism sardonically in order to scotch Rome's idea of having an emperor-god. In short, John unfavourably compared the emperor to he whom Christians worshipped as God, and perhaps also had in mind the more general idea following Paul's poetic use of *god*, for this rebellious age has, so to speak, a *god* who opposes the christ of God (2 Cor.4:4). It was a situational, not a theological, use of 'god' (θεος/*theos*). For study purposes, formal footnotes should suffice, leaving monotheistic translation for standard text. Alas, old habits die hard. Translation should at least use the lowercase form, *god*, as befits OT use. For polytheist inclusion, the MEVV all have 3:12; 7:10,12; 12:10; 19:1,5; 21:7. For polytheist exclusion, the MEVV have 2:7 (all); 4:11 (8/10); 19:6 (6/10); 1:6; 21:3 (4/10); 3:2 (2/10); 5:10; 7:3 (1/10), with the CEV excluding all except 7:3, which the NLT excludes.[208] The NABRE is worst (with no exclusion); the CEV is best (with most exclusion).

Symbolic Numbers

For convenience, I have followed Michael Kuykendall, and for simplicity have missed many good points in grading MEVV, not least in the fact that "modern Bibles should remain consistent in their renderings of words that are found exactly seven times" (*Themelios*, 2022.47.3). In *Revelation*, numbers are codes, symbols linked to biblical themes, for good and for evil, a fact overlooked by some Bible versions in the interests of enculturation.

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[208] The same Greek ἡμων/*hēmōn* (of us) is in 7:3 & 4:11, so the NLT's consistency could be improved, hopefully towards polytheistic exclusion.

In short, the Generally Good Numbers are two, four, seven, ten, and twelve. Two symbolises completeness and is often connected to a valid testimony and effectual witness. Four signifies full and total coverage, most often in view of God's creation, the surface of the earth, and universality. Seven connotes completeness, fullness, totality, and perfection. Ten (and its multiples) emphasises indefiniteness, magnitude, and completeness, often from the point of view of time and humanity, especially with satanic influence and activity in mind. Twelve symbolises fullness and completeness, often with humanity in mind, with special reference to the saints.

In short, the Generally Bad Numbers are fractions—such as one-third, one-fourth, and one-half, mean something is incomplete. Three and a half is half of the perfect number of seven. It is a 'bad' number because alongside its variants ("42 months" (= 3½ 12 month-years); "1,260 days" (= 3½ 360 day-years), and "a time, times, and half a time"), it emphasises the time period of persecution for the saints. 666 stands for incompleteness and imperfection (six is just short of perfection but looks perfect). Numbers can also express the uncountable, eg Rv.9:16, where a functional equivalence is fine, and a literal equivalence is crass, the forest hiding the trees. On numbers, MEVV Grades = A+ (LEB/NABRE/NIV); A (NKJV); B+ (ERV/NRSV); C (CEB/NLT); D- (CEV/NCV).

Rapture Anxiety

In 1988, Barry Chant and Winkie Pratney co-authored a book entitled, *The Return*. It presents a fair, balanced, and easy-access work around the subject of eschatology, specifically the return—the parousia—of Jesus, and compares the various main methods of interpretation of the human state of affairs prior to, and including, that event. A standout comment made in it, is that the doctrine of the return is given for two basic reasons, namely to give us hope in a darkening world, and to encourage our holiness (Chant 248). I still think that covers much wisdom, and their book helped foster my interest in eschatology. Eschatology has, however, never been a central plank of my teaching, but I have long believed that it should be an important plank on our Christian floor.

Similarly, a foundational work for me on this has been by C S Lewis. Some Christians have right hope, right holiness, and wrong fear perhaps based on their unholiness—are any of us perfect in holiness? I recall one middle-aged woman warning me in the eighties, *What if Jesus comes back while you are in a sinema?*[209] Some feel a grim giant dragging them into the dark dungeon of despair. However, some get excited, and try to expedite his return as soon, if not sooner, than it is to be, stretching on emotional tippy-toes to rise up heavenwards.

Recently *The Christian Post* flagged up an article on Rapture Anxiety. Seemingly some have become ex-Christians, or at least exvangelicals, in reaction to such anxiety. Have you missed The End? Are you going to miss it? Have you committed the Unpardonable Sin? Is your latest sin, forgiven?[210] Of course, any specialist area can suffer from subject-related anxieties. Neuroses are common in life. Being too up in the air, a neurosurgeon might become convinced that they need their head examined, but on the other hand, a podiatrist usually has their feet firmly on the ground, though they can be a little unbalanced.

Lewis noted that eschatology is biblical, and creedal (1975:65).[211] And that it can be embarrassing, because too many high-profile predictions have been boasted and broken, such as by C19 William Miller, who set a date in his lifetime for Jesus to return—Jesus did not return then, and Miller has died since. But largely the C19 deeschatologised Christianity. Albert Schweitzer insisted that Jesus had mistakenly believed—and had made impossible ethical demands predicated on this mistaken idea—that God's kingdom would come before he died. So, was Jesus' death a lamentable

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209 With a twinkle in his eye, her husband had said, once she had moved away, Yes, but she'll watch the same things on TV. Was the venue of cinema sinful?

210 To these four of many questions, for you I'd say No (to 1#); No (to 2#); If you're concerned then you are not under the Unforgiveable Sin (to 3#); and That's only relevant to ongoing, pastoral, salvation before the Rapture (to 4#).

211 The essay is entitled, *The World's Last Night*.

mistake he made to force God's intervening hand? Did the church have to reinvent the idea of God's kingdom yet to come, and an interim ethic? Should we not ignore this unhappy gaffe of the Bible, and simply study and practice its high level of ethics?

Lewis said that it's unwise to judge Jesus by simpletons, even intelligent simpletons. Nor must we write off all else which Jesus taught on eschatology, apart from his unique content. For that assumes that all his generation knew about this subject, was false, and imposes a false evolutionism (Chronological Snobbery) on Scripture. Could God not have given them true insights, which the C1 Jesus saw best of all?[212] Must we assume them totally blind, and only Jesus' unique selling point, as sight? Some switch it: where Jesus differed from his people, he was wrong.[213] Could it be that he might have been right in full, and his people in part?

Lewis called Mk.13:30, "the most embarrassing verse in the Bible" (1975:69). But before we jump to the idea that Jesus was mistaken, we should note that almost immediately Jesus added that even he did not know "that day or hour". Moreover, the fact that decades later the Gospel writer kept both the seeming gaffe, and the certain self-certified ignorance of Jesus (32), tells a story. Do such texts "make up the strongest proof that the NT is historically reliable" (Lewis 1975:70), telling a story of integrity? For who but an honest writer would highlight a gaffe—followed by a confession of ignorance—by one they deemed to be in a one-of-a-kind sense, God's son who had been raised from death and was their lord?

Lewis noted how it can seem to us to be a gaffe. But decades on, did the Gospel writers think it to be a gaffe? Perhaps if we hear with their ears, we would hear a better story. "There is no need to seek some esoteric interpretation of [this generation], once we realize that the event being referred to by 'these things' and 'all these things' in

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212 That they had some weed-ideas, is clear enough, such as their politicalisation of messiahship, one reason why Jesus kept quiet about his messiahship.

213 In a woke world, this indeed is often politically assumed of Christians.

Mk.13:29–30,[214] is the same as 'these things' and 'all these things' in 13:4—Jesus's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in 13:2" (Stein 15781-3/29605).[215] And we might add, persecution of the church.

Lewis had a fair point as to v32, but increased the puzzle if they were thinking of Jesus as being God, as Lewis assumed. Personally, I think that they had better insight, though uncrystallised theologically. Theologically, Jesus was not God omniscient, but was and is the permanent temporal (time/space) mode of the uncreated eternal second person of deity. God's son incarnate/physical had the limitations of carnate/physical humanity, not the unlimitations of God the son noncarnate/nonphysical, the personhood without the incommunicable attributes, of God the son.

Lewis used shorthand outside of biblical context—viz *Jesus is God*—throwing up needless confusion, though in meeting the person of Jesus we are indeed meeting the person of God the son, who noncarnate is indeed of the same substance (*homoousios*: Athanasius) as God the father and God the spirit.[216] Thus Jesus' knowledge *was* indeed limited. The Gospel writers seemed happy to publish this human side of their lord, not wishing to make him out for what he was not, as if some kind of Apollinarianism.

Lewis noted that we might not actually like the idea of Christ's return, for it could mean upsetting our plans. This can be the more objectionable if our plans seem upwards/utopian, whether for us

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214 Stein also argued for εγγυς εστιν/*engus estin* as 'it is near', not 'he is near'. Agreed: ERV/NCV; mainly agreed: CEV/NIV/NKJV; mainly disagreed: NRSV; disagreed: CEB/LEB/NABRE/NLT. If 'he is near', was Titus meant? *Contra* Stein, Carson held *engus estin* to mean it-the-return, or he-the-returner.

215 Carson 2010:895, agreeing 'this generation' to have lived through ethno-Jerusalem's fall (AD 70), connects the theme of interadvent persecution to arise: Jerusalem's fall was factored in. *That generation* did *not* pass away until persecution *had* begun and Jerusalem *had* fallen.

216 There are Jesus-is-God shorthand texts in Scripture, though their context always shows a moreness to deity. There is more to Yahweh than Yeshua. MEVV Grades = A+ (NLT); A (NRSV); B+ (ERV/NIV); B (NCV); C+ (CEB); C (CEV/LEB); D- (NABRE/NKJV).

individually or for us societally. Children might just be getting into their best ever game, when their father calls them away.

Lewis touched on Charles Darwin, who offered scientific backing to a pre-existing idea of societal improvement. But in fact Darwin spoke more of evolution-change as *random*, not as *improvement*, and that biological improvement—incidentally from what point of view *improved*?—does not in itself correlate to character improvement. In fact, Perry Marshall has argued that *contra* Darwin, biological evolution is intelligent, not random, therefore *can* intentionally add value: but that's another book. Lewis knew that many were scientifically discontent with Darwinianism.

Lewis underlined that eschatology teaches us that "we do not and cannot know when the world drama will end" (Lewis 1975:76). We might not like that idea, and it might sound somewhat like Wagner's Wotan, but we must take the Medicine of Realism, and lay our dreams and hopes on God's altar, as did Abraham.

Lewis underlined that we ought not be taken up with eschatology to the extent of sidelining our duties in life. He tended to link idle speculation about Christ's return, with idleness of life (Lewis 1975:78). Though not linking 2 Ths.3:6 (apathy) with 2:2 (excitement), I agree that some can be fatalistic about eschatology: why do anything, if Christ's return will undo all? However, they overlook that Christ is pleased with our good efforts, even if our good works are unhelpful. That we mean well by what we do, is what counts.

Lewis' advice was to neither be too hesitant nor too excited, but to live and work in the calm—neither excitable nor fearful—a background awareness and hope that this present might be the world's last night. As to fear, he wisely noted that religious fear is not in itself barbaric, and that while indeed God's love casts out fear, so can "ignorance, alcohol, passion, presumption, and stupidity" (Lewis 1975:80). Therefore, while it might be right to let love cast out fear—though contextually it's about God's love overcoming a warped fear of judgement—we should not let inferior agents cast it out. Indeed, religious fear has its proper place—as does religious excitement, for that matter.

Lewis noted that emotions, such as fear and excitement, do not perpetuate themselves. The important job, he said, was not trying to maintain such emotions, but trying to maintain the background awareness of the underlying realities, irrespective of when they shall dawn. Background awareness. If aged 80, it might be foolish to begin a 40-year scheme in the hope of reaping its harvest, and foolish not to have a Will drawn up. Background awareness has its place in life, helping to shape our ways. "Now, what death is to each person, the second coming is to the whole human race" (Lewis 1975:81). Be prepared; be doing. And like each human life, the human race is precarious, temporary, provisional. Only the new humanity begun in Christ, is about everlasting man.

Lewis again asked why we should seek to add value to society, if society might end at any moment. Besides helping others until Christ returns—interim help—again it's because God's assessment might come at that self-same moment as Christ's second coming. Not, *Did we reap a good harvest*, but, *Were we labouring well in the fields*; was our hand to the plough, or were we as a sentry asleep at their post? Let us bear in mind that put another way, God's *Well done, good and faithful servant*, is his *I am well pleased*. Let us seek to please him, irrespective of any reward. And yet our reward might be in the fact of knowing that we have pleased him by intent, and do please him by heart. And when Christ returns, we shall know ourselves, as we are known. We might not be the fairest in that perfect mirror, but we shall be blest to fully see what we are, warts and wonders.

Lewis reckoned that it was this final knowing each of themself, rather than images of physical catastrophe, which best helped him to look forward to the final judgement. Let us dress, he advised, not in the electric light of the present world, but in the daylight of the next, "for that light will last longer" (Lewis 1975:85).

Maranatha

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Books by this Author

Theology

Israel's Gone Global

Israel's Gone Global traces salvation through the term, Israel. Was the covenant with the people-nation of Yakob-Yisrael, crossed out? How eternal is covenant? To examine that, we examine marriage. Can a covenant partner be truly divorced? Has Yeshua-Yisrael mediated a spiritual covenant with a spiritual Israel? Is evangelism of ethnic Jews needless, a priority, or neither?

No one could have everlasting life but for the cross, but has it always been globally accessible? Might any who die as Atheists, Hindus, or Islamists, make heaven? And is eternal life joyful? Is everlasting life fun?

Tackling the question of people who die in infancy (or as adults who never heard the gospel), we consider whether it is fair if only those who don't die in infancy get a chance of eternal damnation (if infant universalism), or alone get a chance of eternal heaven (if infant damnation). Does predilectionism make best sense of biblical revelation?

Opportunities to enjoy eternal life spring from the new covenant—reasons to rejoice. But what about salvation history before that covenant?

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Singing's Gone Global

Singing's Gone Global, briefly explores the background of singing, before and into ancient Israel. It examines the impact songs have on those who sing, and on those who listen, touching on spiritual warfare. It looks at how nonsense songs neither make sense to evangelism, nor to the evangelised, and asks, "Is there a mûmak in the room?"

Oddly some songwriters simply misunderstand prayer. Part two covers the basics of the trinity, focusing on the spirit in order to understand

types of prayer (eg request, gratitude, adoration, chat), leading in turn to a better understanding of our heavenly father, our brother, our helper, and ourselves in Christ's likeness.

Next we look at some common problems. Part three focuses on problems such as buddyism, decontextualising, misvisualisation, and unitarianism. Diagnosis can help Christ's 'bride' to recover from suboptimal and unbiblical songs (Eph.5:18-30).

Giving a Problem Avoidance Grade (PAG)—an A+ to Unsatisfactory scale—in part four we examine specific songs. Weapons forged (Part three), the mûmakil can be attacked, seeking to save and be saved.

Subsequently the book concludes by showing how Christmas carols may be tweaked to better serve our weary world, rejoicing that joy to the world has come.

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The Word's Gone Global

The Word's Gone Global, examines Bible text (trusted by early Islam) and introduces textual critique. It looks at the Eastern Orthodox Bible and the Latin Vulgate. Did the Reformation improve text and translation? Were Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Martin, helpful?

Why did the New International Version begin, and why does it enrage? Why did complementarians Don Carson and Wayne Grudem, clash? Is marketing hype between formal and functional equivalence, meaningless? Which version or versions should you regularly read?

In English-speaking circles, Broughton wished to burn Bancroft's King James Version, yet many KJV proponents—think Gail Riplinger and Peter Ruckman—wish to burn all alternatives. More heat than light?

Grade Charts cover 30+ English versions on issues such as God's name, God's son's deity, marriage, gender terms, anti-polytheism, and various issues in John's Gospel. No, Tyndale was not 'born again'. No, John was not antisemitic. No, he did not disagree with the other Gospels.

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Prayer's Gone Global

Prayer's Gone Global, begins with ancient civilisations and prayer (the Common Level). Then it narrows into Ancient Israel and prayer (the

Sinai Level). Then it deepens and widens into Global Israel and prayer (the Christian Level). Deity is revealed as trinity: Sabellians mislead.

Relating to the trinity includes the Holy Spirit. We should of course work with him, but should we worship him, complain to him, chat with him? Above the spirit stands the often forgotten father—oh let Jesusism retire.

Authority is another issue. Are we authorised to decree and declare? Is binding and loosing actually prayer, or is it evangelism? Is it biblical never to command miracles? Do we miss out on the supernatural which Jesus modelled for us, too fearful of strange fire to offer holy fire?

You can freshen up your prayer life—ride the blessed camel, not the gnats. Listen to Saint Anselm pray, and C S Lewis and 'Malcolm' discuss prayer, and be blessed.

∞

Revelation's Gone Global

Revelation's Gone Global, is a telling of John's future, as if by a then contemporary named Sonafets speaking to his church about how John's apocalyptic scroll related to their days, and about what was still future to John.

Encouragement is a big theme. Roman persecution was an unpredictable beast which ferociously lashed out here and there—what church or Christian was safe? But God stood behind the scenes, allowing but limiting their enemy, and messiah walked among the churches, lights to the world.

Victory lay neither with Rome nor demons, but with God, and with the warrior lamb who had been slain. Victory was guaranteed, and would finally be enjoyed.

Exhortation was given to believers, to play their part while on the mortal stage. They were to walk in the light, and not to let the show down by straying.

Angels of power, actively working out God's will, far exceed the puny forces against God and his church. His wrath was not pleasant, but could be redemptive until the new age begins.

C S Lewis' essay, The World's Last Night, is briefly examined to enjoin a calm awareness of the ongoing battle we are in, and the brightness to come when the king returns.

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The Father's Gone Global

Focusing from God as father, to the specific person of God the father, The Father's Gone Global looks at the biblical parent/child pattern from Genesis, through Sinai, and into the Church.

Abba as a new covenant word expresses deep filial affection even under deep anguish in our Gethsemane battles. Coming through God's belovèd son, it speaks into the church and into our lives.

Though to many the 'forgotten father', human parents/fathers should 'put on' God the father, and his children should 'put on' his son. We forget him to our cost.

Human applications aside, what is the Eternal Society? Is filial relationship modelled by God the son incarnate? Are we to be always obedient to our father and guided by the spirit?

Eschatologically the father will be supreme, but even now he is the one to whom the son points. Christian life should relate to God our father, God our brother, and God our helper, prioritising the father.

Renewal of the church is vital for our confused world, but renewal which downplays the father falls short of the good news which Christ created and the spirit circulates. May this book play its part.

∞

Salvation Now and Life Beyond

Salvation Now, divides the doctrine of salvation into the four main levels of common humanity, the old covenant, the new covenant, and life beyond.

A big weight is put on the term, Israel, as God's master plan. This too has four levels, meaning a man, a people, a new man, and a new people, respectively.

Various ideas of what Christianity, the new covenant for the new people, is good for, and how we get into it and best enjoy it, are examined, and a faith-based inexclusivism is suggested.

Everlasting life is seen as the ultimate goal of salvation, universal meaningfulness and love beyond all fears and pains.

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Revisiting

Revisiting The Challenging Counterfeit

Revisiting The Challenging Counterfeit, is an extended review of Raphael Gasson's 'The Challenging Counterfeit' (1966). Raphael was an ethnic Jew whose spiritual journey included many years as a Christian Spiritualist minister.

Today, when psychic phenomena captures the imagination and the bank accounts of popular media, it is useful to unearth the witness of one who had well worn the T-shirt of a medium with pride, only to bury it in unholy ground as a thing of shame and of sorrow and of wasted time.

Challengingly, his book exposes what true Spiritualism is. He had nothing but high praise for Spiritualists, and deep condemnation for Spiritualism. For he had discovered true Spiritualism to be itself a fake of true Spirituality, a mere Counterfeit that, in deposing death in the mind, enthroned it in the soul.

Counterfeit phenomena covered include apparitions, Rescue Work and haunted houses, materialisation of pets, psychic healing, Lyceums, clairvoyance, and OOBEs—to name but a few. This book surveys his exposé of Spiritualism's offer of fascinating fish bait, false food falling short of real food for the soul. Though it takes issue with Raphael on a number of points, his core insights are powerful and timely, helping us to avoid—or escape from—a Challenging Counterfeit, and to discover true spiritual currency.

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Revisiting The Pilgrim's Progress

Revisiting The Pilgrim's Progress, is a re-dreaming of John Bunyan's most famous dream. An ex-serviceman and ex-jailbird, he found fortune, freedom, and fans worldwide.

This dream journey is substantially Bunyan's from this world, and into that which is to come. It is not a fun story, but it has lots of danger, and joy, and reflection on some big life themes.

Profoundly, sinners who become pilgrims become saints. But that can make life more difficult. One big question is, Is it worth it? One big temptation is, Turn back or turn aside. And if you see others do so, that makes it harder not to. Bunyan was tempted. And he discovered that not deserting, can lead to despair. But he also discovered a key to liberty.

Pre-eminently, it is a story of grace which many follow. Grace begins the journey, helps along the way, and brings the story to a happily ever after. Are all fairy stories based on heaven?

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Fantasy

The Simbolinian Files

From Simboliniad, a crystal planet long gone, came the vampire race, the wapierze, thelodynamic shapeshifters seeking blood. Most oppose Usen, King of the Light, so side with the Necros. Seldom do the Guardians intervene. These files, secretly secured from various insider sources, reveal something of what they have done, and will do.

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Vampire Redemption

Artificial intelligence, created by superpowers to save man, questions man's worth, and becomes The Beast. Escaping into the wild, many discover a wilderness infested by zombies and diabolical spirits. Who will help? Father Doyle? He's tied up with the mysterious Lilith. Tariq? He's tied up with Wilma. Can the bigoted old exorcist deliver him from evil?

Radical problems can require radical solutions. But does man really need hobs, elves, and the more ancient of days? In the surrounding shadows, vampires and demons form an alliance, raising the stakes against Whitby and Tyneside. Powerful vampires live shrouded within Whitby, speaking of life beyond this galaxy. Is salvation in the stars? Is Sunniva, the despised woman of Alban, worth dying for? Big questions, needing big answers. Not even Guardian Odin can foretell man's fate and, as silent stars go by, one little town must awake from its dreams.

Though The Beast slumbers purposeless and undisturbed, in the far west a global giant slowly opens its yellow eyes and threatens to smother the earth in fire and ice. There is one chance only.

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Vampire Extraction

Bitterly long their imprisoned spirits lay, fast bound to Earth's drowsy decay. To the Simbolinian race, there was no hell on Earth, for Earth was hell, and Usen the cosmic jailer. Was it so surprising that as vampires they stalked Usen's children for blood? Most chose the Kingdom of Night, wary of both the Kingdom of Necros and the Kingdom of Dawn.

As queen of the Night, Lilith's story streams through the summer sands of Sumer, and through the green woods of Sherwood. It flags up both dishonour and joy, and cuts across the paths of Ulrica the Saxon and Robin the Hood, as tyrannies rise and fall in merry England. Bigotry seldom has a good word to say about Usen, nor about mercy. Reluctantly, Lilith examines what it means to show mercy, to show weakness. Wulfgar had enslaved Ulrica: is it mercy to let her burn; should mercy have spared Lona? Could Hamashiach turn daughter into sister? Could Count Dracula be turned from his madness? Has Draven really betrayed his mother? Life has many questions.

Tales picture ideas, letting us walk through the eyes of others to better see ourselves. This story exposes subplots behind common history. How these chronicles came to be written up is, in the spirit confidentiality, not for the public eye. What truth is within you must judge. Discrimination is a gift from Beyond, from which the words still echo: mercy is better than sacrifice. Indeed mercy can be sacrifice. Judge well.

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Vampire Count

Vampires were not always earthbound, nor are all evil, but being victims of Usen's Eighth Law, his Children became their fair game. Yet the Night Kingdom was divided: some veered to the Necros; some to the Dawn. Who was wrong; who was right?

Long ago one incited his people to racial violence against elven and human kinds. Ever he strove to be king of the Night, and unto Necuratu the Dark Lord he gave the dragon shape. He made war upon the ancient Middle East, even the Nephilim War. Against him the Light raised flood and division.

At last his own people, paying the price of his rampage, bound him in deep sleep. Yet the millennia seemed meaningless to him: even the rising of Hamashiach hardly disturbed his dreams. At last awoken, he and his brides stalked the hills of Transylvania. Only the fear of Lilith—and after her unforgivable sin, Queen Rangda—chained their bloodlust.

Dracula sought escape and autonomy. By cunning and devious means, he immigrated to London via Whitby. Pursuit followed swiftly, with a shadowminder helping a circle of human headhunters, though they sought the death of all vampires.

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Vampire Grail

Wulfgar is a vampire, a thelodynamic creature from another galaxy, now locked into our world by one called the Cosmic Jailer. He hides a tormenting secret from his queen, Lilith, which the Necros use as blackmail. She will only go so far with the Necros against Hamashiach—Wulfgar must go further.

Unknown to the Darkness, to bury Hamashiach is to plant the Light. From the buried seed springs life, and humanity must reimagine itself. Longinus turns to The Way, the nexus of the Seventh Age. His spear goes on a special mission to the island of Briton, where Wulfgar lives again.

Logres is centred on Avalon, but raises up Arthur, a man of mixed race, to carry its flag and to protect against the Saxons. But its main enemy is the Darkness, which ever seeks to extinguish the Light it hates and fears.

Finally, it seems as if the Darkness has won, and the dark ages descend. But does the Light not shine in the Darkness? Must Wulfgar remain in the Night?

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Vampire Shadows

Dark vampires, hidden within the ancient empire of Khem, fall out with the king who, stirred up by the Necros, enslaves the Sheep People. But Iahveh, the shepherd-divinity, is stirred up, and stirs up a hidden hero to force a way out.

Apprehensively the two vampire-magicians join the Sheep of Iahveh, on their long and deadly trek in search of a promised land. Can any survive?

Warily they ask deep questions. Is Usen evil, as prejudice says? Is he possibly a good jailer? Are his unusual regulations, meaningful? They risk ending up in death.

Neverendingly the Sheep's sorry story drags out in interminable peregrination. Weary of wandering, most would settle for some green pastures and untroubled waters. But as they well know, that would take a miracle.